

Studies in Medieval History and Culture

**WARFARE AND THE MAKING
OF EARLY MEDIEVAL ITALY
(568–652)**

Edoardo Fubini



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Warfare and the Making of Early Medieval Italy (568–652)

Devastated by two decades of war and ravaged by the spread of the plague, large parts of Italy fell quickly into the hands of a group known to history as the Lombards. By the early 570s the Lombards were firmly established in Italy, which they ruled without ever fully unifying it. The events of the late sixth century shaped early medieval Italy. They also affected how Italian history was written: the Lombards were blamed for plunging the peninsula into the darkness of the Middle Ages, finally ending Roman civilization. But was it really a 'barbarian invasion' that created medieval Italy? What was the role of the imperial authorities and the papacy? In *Warfare and the Making of Early Medieval Italy*, Eduardo Fabbro brings a new take on the changes that shook Italy at the end of the sixth century. Moving past traditional narratives of barbarians and battles, the book re-evaluates the impact of war in creating early medieval Italy. Fabbro brings to the fore a complex picture that includes not only invading barbarians but also rebelling soldiers, disgruntled farmers, vexed commanders, and cunning adventurers trying to make the best of a bad situation. Through a complete reassessment of contemporary and later sources, this book rewrites the history of the first decades of Lombard rule and shows that warfare's impact went far beyond battles and invasions; it rewired the social and political links that bound the region.

Eduardo Fabbro received his PhD from the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto. He specializes in early medieval Italy, military history, and the work of eighth-century historian Paul the Deacon. He is currently a lecturer at Trent University.

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Abbreviations

Agathiae Myrinaei historiarum libri quinque, ed. R. Keydell (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967).

Agnellus Ravennatis, *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis*, ed. Deborah M. Deliyannis, CCCM, Turnhout: Brepols, 2006 [Translation: Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, trans. Deborah M. Deliyannis (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, ed. J.C. Rolfe, 3 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935–39).

Beda, ~~Chron. Mabilis~~, *Chronica Maiora*, ed. Th. Mommsen, MGH AA 13 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898), pp. 223–333.

Cassiodorus, *Variae*, ed. Th. Mommsen, MGH, AA, XII (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894).

CD ~~Dice~~ *Diplomatico Longobardo*, 1, 2, ed. L. Schiaparelli (Rome: Tipografia del Senato 1929–33), 3, ed. C.R. Brühl (Rome: Tipografia del Senato 1973), 4/1, ed. C.R. Brühl (Rome: Tipografia del Senato 1981), 4/2, ed. H. Zielinski (Rome: Tipografia del Senato 2003), 5, ed. H. Zielinski (Rome: Tipografia del Senato 1986).

Chron. Patr. Grad. ~~Chron. Patr. Grad.~~ *Gradensium*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH, SRL (Hannover: Hahn, 1878), p. 392–97.

Chron. Pasch. ~~Chron. Pasch.~~ *Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonn: Weber, 1832).

Orig. Goth. ~~Orig. Goth.~~ *Langobardorum codicis Gothanis*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH, SRL (Hannover: Hahn, 1878), pp. 7–11.

Cod. Iust. ~~Cod. Iust.~~ *Justinianus*, ed. P. Krueger, *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1954)

Chen. ~~Chen.~~ *Havniensis* Continuation of Prosper (*Prosperi Aquitani Chronici Continuator Havniensis*), ed. Georg Hille (Berlin: Weidmann, 1866).

Corippus. ~~Corippus.~~ *Iohannidos seu de bellis Libycis Libri IV*, ed. J. Partsch, MGH AA 3 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1879) pp. 1–109.

CTh. ~~CTh.~~ *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis*, ed. Th. Mommsen and P.M. Meyer, vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905)

Epistolae. ~~Epistolae.~~ *Austrasicae*, ed. W. Gundlach, MGH, Epp. 3. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), pp. 110–53.

Epistolae. ~~Epistolae.~~ *Caroli et Lulli epistolae*, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH, Epp. 3. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), pp. 215–433.

Epistolae. ~~Epistolae.~~ *Langobardicae collectae*, ed. W. Gundlach, MGH, Epp. 3. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), pp. 691–715.

Epistolae. ~~Epistolae.~~ *Merovingici collectae*, ed. W. Gundlach, MGH, Epp. 3. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), pp. 434–68.

Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. J. Bidez and L. Permentier (London: Methuen, 1898).

Excerpta. ~~Excerpta.~~ *Sangallensia*, ed. Th. Mommsen MGH AA 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892), pp. 334–36).

Fragn. ~~Fragn.~~ *Secundi*, in MGH SRL, p. 25, n.3.

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and Son, 1960)

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Lex Baiuvariorum, ed. I. Merkel, *MGH, Leges* 3 (Hannover: Hahn, 1926), pp.183–496.

Lex Gundionum, ed. L.R. de Salis, *MGH, LL Nat. Ger.* 2.1. (Hannover: Hahn, 1892), pp. 29–116.

Libellus Iudicum in Leges Visigothorum, ed. K. Zeumer, *MGH, LL Nat. Ger.* 1 (Hannover: Hahn, 1902), pp. 33–456.

Leges Ahistulfi, ed. G. Pertz, *MGH, Leges* 4 (Hannover: Hahn, 1868), pp. 194–205.

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Roticus Rothari, ed. G. Pertz, *MGH, Leges* 4 (Hannover: Hahn, 1868), pp. 3–90.

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Map 1 The Mediterranean

Map 2 Gaul (c. 567)

Map 3 Italy

Introduction

Few historical periods offer the scholar challenges similar to the early Middle Ages. Any attempt to understand the five hundred years ranging from the end of the Roman Empire in the West to the Carolingians faces two daunting obstacles. First, the scholar must face the question of the ‘origins of the modern world’. The early Middle Ages has long been seen as the cradle of European nations, from where new peoples sprang to redraw the map of the continent and a world of nations dawned. The period indeed witnessed significant political changes in the West, most prominently the disappearance of the Roman political system and the emergence of the ‘post-Roman kingdoms’. And, although allusion of ‘new Romes’ abound, it is in the creation of the ‘post-Roman kingdoms’ that most European states looked for their ‘origins’. Therefore, the history of the Franks becomes the history of France, the Visigoths, Spain, the Anglo-Saxons, England, and the Lombards, Italy, while the establishment of those ‘nations’ in Roman soil becomes the foundational act of these countries. Whether those kingdoms were brought about by conquest or grant, whether the Romans were integrated or exterminated, and even the precise contours of their domain thus acquire an undue bearing on the nature of the future nations—as if, to paraphrase Marc Bloch (1949, 21), purely studying the seed sufficed to fully understand the tree.

This obsession with origins marked profoundly the study of the period, and interest in the early Middle Ages peaks whenever the identity of the continent (or of individual nations) is at stake. The recent *Transformations of the Roman World* (1993–98) project comes to mind, sponsoring research during the consolidation of the European Union in the 1990s. Similar examples are legion. That was the case of the so-called *Krieg der Professoren* after the German unification in 1870 (Haubrichs 1996; Fehr 2010) or the long debates on the origins of France starting in the 1730s and leading all the way through the French Revolution (Nicolet 2003). In recent years, scholars have become increasingly aware of the incestuous relationship between the study of the early Middle Ages and the political needs of the day, especially the rise of nations in the nineteenth century. Ian Wood’s *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages* (2013) is but one example of such interest, from which medieval studies still have much to profit. Moreover, the internationalization of early medieval studies has

helped scholarship to see beyond these national narratives, replacing anachronistic boundaries with more inclusive global narratives. The monuments of nineteenth-century scholarship preserve nonetheless the momentum of nationalist historiography, whether in the collection and editions of primary sources or in the grand narratives of the events.

Keeping nationalistic narratives at bay, the scholar of the early Middle Ages still has to face the state of the documentation. Not unlike modern historians, early medieval writers also projected the origins of their kingdoms into the last centuries of the Roman Empire. It goes without saying that the devastations of war, unrest, and internal instability disrupt the preservation of historical records of all sorts. Such times impinge on the production of historical sources even more deeply: from the dearth of resources to allow for proper historical reflection to the absence of consensus to inform historical narratives. In the fifth and sixth centuries, this combination resulted in a historical production mostly limited to terse chronicle entries. It was only later on, when the uncertainty was over and the post-Roman kingdoms were an established reality, that writers such as Fredegar, Isidore, and Paul the Deacon produced their histories. Then, the need was for narratives explaining the new configuration, and establishing a respectable past for the new polities. These narratives often relied on mythical heroes and long migrations to explain the creation of the new nations and the origins of the new ruling class. The Frankish example is the most noteworthy: while the origins of the Frankish kings were simply a curiosity for Gregory of Tours in the late sixth century (*Hist.* 2.9), by the seventh century the outlines of an epic migration linking the Franks with the Trojans had been firmly established (Fred, 2.4–5, *LHF*, c. 1); the ‘Trojan myth’ was accepted until the eighteenth century (Nicolet 2003, 41–48). Helmut Reimitz (2015) has recently shown the depth of this connection between history and the creation and re-creation of Frankish identity. Other contemporary narratives produced similar origins for the Goths (Jordanes, *Getica*, c. 4ff.) and for the Lombards (*Origo gentis Langobardorum* [*Origo*], c. 1–4), which, since their imaginary migrations followed a more philologically sound path (retracing ‘Germanic peoples’ into the depths of *Germania*), and easily fed into nineteenth-century narratives of nations, better withstood the test of time and still populate textbooks as historical events. The combination of this early medieval ‘national histories’ with the needs of nineteenth-century historiography to locate modern nations into the distant past resulted in a maze, which scholars of the early Middle Ages must navigate, confront, and contest.

Paul the Deacon and Lombard history

The core ‘national history’ for the Lombard period is Paul the Deacon’s *Historia Langobardorum* (*HL*). To this day, every history of the Lombards is, to some extent, a commentary on Paul the Deacon’s *opera prima*. Paul not only preserved a large amount of evidence about (although not necessary *from*) the early days of the Lombards up to his own time, but he also organized, classified, and reconstructed the information he had into a consistent narrative. It is indeed a magnificent work. The multitude of copies attests for its contemporary success—few medieval works of history were preserved in as many manuscripts as the *History of the Lombards*, an impressive 115 medieval copies (Pani 2000). Modern historians have shown similar affection: Paul’s narrative reads better and provides a richer trove than the confusing and often contradictory notes of near-contemporary sources. Thus, most modern accounts follow the *HL* closely, trusting Paul to iron out the wrinkles of the early evidence into a smooth narrative. The result, as Francesco More has rightly put it, is the ‘typical use of Paul’s narrative: what Paul says and what happened mostly coincide’ (Mores 2013, 214).

The *HL*, however, has a dual nature, being at the same time a primary and a secondary source, and that has often misled scholars. To the modern historian, Paul is indeed a primary source for his own age, but he is also a commentator of earlier sources, a historian of the Lombards. Controversy arises when scholars try to draw the line between Paul the eighth-century Lombard aristocratic monk and Paul the historian of the distant past; in other words, between Paul the *primary* source, and Paul the *secondary* source. Born an aristocrat in the 720s, Paul was in position to gather a good deal of first-hand information, not only from his lifetime, but also from witnesses going back to the last decades of the seventh century. For the early days of the Lombards, however, Paul operates more as a historian than a witness. He compiled a dossier of sources from which he structured a narrative that fit his argument, producing, not without a good number of creative interventions, the coherent narrative that makes the *HL* such an interesting read—and a tempting authority for modern historians. It is exactly this active role in elaborating the past into an account of Lombard history that makes Paul a problematic source. Paul’s authorial voice has received significant attention in recent scholarship, which has shown the influence of his career, his biases, and the possible sponsors of his historical works; it has also highlighted his use of literary devices and elements of composition (e.g., Goffart 1988, 329–431; Bullough 1991; McKitterick 1999, 2000, 2004; Capo 2000).¹ This complete reassessment of Paul as a writer has

drastically changed the modern understanding of his work; it is, however, yet to find echo in historical analyses of Lombard Italy, in which the *HL* still reigns uncontested.

This ongoing reliance on the *HL* as the basis for the history of early medieval Italy stems from the fact that Paul the historian had access to ‘lost *primary* sources’, which guarantee his reliability. The *extant* sources in the *HL* are relatively simple to establish: Bede’s *Chronica*, the *Liber Pontificalis* (*LP*), (some version of) Gregory the Great’s *Registrum*, (some version of) the anonymous *Origo Langobardorum*, Gregory of Tours’ *Histories*, (possibly) Fredegar’s *Chronicle*, amongst a few others² The *non-extant* sources, however, present a methodological problem. Paul unquestionably had access to works that no longer survive: for the period concerned in this book, which encompasses Book 2 to Book 4.47 of the *HL*, it is evident that Paul relied on a number of written sources that no longer exist. This material left a mark in entries that display an uncharacteristic chronological precision and a somewhat terse chronicle style. These entries have been usually seen as evidence of Paul’s reliance on Secundus of Trent, one of the very few sources Paul actually mentions in the text, which becomes thus the guarantor of most of Paul’s earlier material (Jacobi 1877, 66–79; Gardiner 1983; Pohl 2004b). The extent of Paul’s borrowings from Secundus, however, cannot be established with certainty. If a presumed lost source is accepted for each part of the *HL* that cannot be verified elsewhere, the distinction between the reliability of Paul and his primary sources disappears, allowing the entire *HL* to be taken as a primary source, now with a specious stamp of quality. The choice was either to fully accept the *HL* or to simply dismiss it as literary fabrication, focusing instead in its value as a text. This book aims to address this situation.

- ¹ The question of sponsorship is, however, particularly contentious. I have suggested elsewhere (forthcoming, 2020) that Paul wrote on Carolingian pay, but that his audience was indeed the Beneventan duke Grimoald III; although I follow this interpretation here, the present book does not necessarily depend on it.
- ² The fundamental work was done in the nineteenth century, and it is still somewhat valid. See Jacobi 1877; Mommsen 1880; more recently, see Bognetti 1967b; Goffart 1988, 381; McKitterick 2004, 60–83.

The present work

The approach here is different. To trace the possible sources used by Paul—and thus track in the *HL* what reports to a contemporary source and what does not—I established a methodology to reconstruct an

imaginary ‘library of lost sources’. This approach, labeled ‘bibliographic archeology’, consists in producing a list of possible lost sources based on their use not in the text under scrutiny, here the *History of the Lombards*, in other contemporary surviving works. Thus, all sixth- and early-seventh-century references to Italy were scanned to sketch possible lost sources in near-contemporary authors. For instance, two Gallic historians, Gregory of Tours and Marius of Avenches, shared a source for their Italian material ending in the 580s: that suggests that, for events before the 580s, there *existed* a contemporary source that is now lost, but which Paul might have used. This approach filtered the information in Paul and guided the selection of passages that could be traced to a contemporary source. Admittedly, this methodology risks ignoring isolated sources, unknown to all but Paul. Alas, this material may have existed, but acknowledging it without further evidence not only adds an extra layer of uncertainty but also makes the *HL* the only source for the sources in the *HL*, leading to a circular argument. The same methodology was applied, when needed, to all surviving sources for the period, re-creating thus an earlier textual layer between these texts and contemporary witnesses to the events.

This analysis produced a number of possible lost sources. [Chapters 1 and 2](#) rely on two of them. The first, a northern Italian source based on consuls, finished around 580s. This text, called here ‘consular source’, was the source used by Gallic authors such as Gregory of Tours and Marius of Avenches, and described the chaos the advent of the Lombards caused in northern Italy, and was known to Paul. Somewhat contemporaneous was a chronicle source produced most likely around Rome or Ravenna, which recorded the strange dealings between the Byzantine commander Narses and the Lombards, the so-called ‘invitation story’. It is suggested in [Chapter 1](#) that this source was connected with Longinus, who replaced Narses, and attempted to scapegoat the old commander for the collapse of imperial authority in the north. This source was not available to Paul, but informed both Isidore’s *Chronicle* and the *LP*, which were. Another source was behind the sections of the *HL* covering period 590–612 (*HL* 3.35–4.40). It is argued in [Chapter 4](#) that this source was three different texts, a continuation of ‘chronicle source I’ to the early 590s, a royally sponsored narrative finishing in 612, and a brief text connecting both. This text, labeled here ‘chronicle source II’, informed the *HL* but also the *Origo* and the *Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper* (henceforth *CH*). Finally, [Chapter 5](#) suggests Rothari sponsored his own history of the Lombards, first in a chronicle supporting his skill-based claim to the throne, the surviving *CH*, then a mythical narrative of the Lombard past, an early version of the *Origo*, which paired with his codification

of the law.

The primary goal of reassessing the earlier material in the *HL* (and placing Paul in a broader historiographical context) was to stress how much in its narrative is taken for granted, and how much of it has no likely basis in contemporary evidence. This critique aims to reveal layers of Paul's agenda and the mechanisms through which he worked his sources. It also aims to dispel myths he created. For instance, [Chapter 2](#) dismisses most of what *HL* had to say about Friuli, enlisting contemporary evidence to question the narrative of 'first duchy', so dear to Paul. The same chapter questions the concatenation of events behind Alboin's successful but tragic career. [Chapter 3](#) likewise brings to question Paul's version of the *interregnum* and the re-creation of the monarchy, while [Chapter 4](#) rejects the early history of the dukes Arichis and Ariulf. Finally, [Chapter 5](#) challenges Paul's picture of Rothari as a successful military king. The aim of this revisionist take is to shake the certitudes that surrounded the history of early medieval Italy, certitudes that stem from an often-uncritical reception of the *HL*. If this book accomplishes this goal, it has fulfilled its purpose.

Shattering certainties, although necessary, is hardly sufficient. Much revisionist scholarship falls short by stopping at pointing out what cannot be said. I have here attempted to go beyond that and, taking into account this reassessment of the sources, suggest a new interpretation of the early Lombard period. This book was indeed born out of a historical (rather than a historiographical) question, namely, to what extent the sixth-century Lombards were connected to the Byzantine army. The hypothesis of a close connection between Lombards and the imperial army can be traced, as so many things Lombard, back to Gian Piero Bognetti (1967a), and has received some more recent attention from the pen of Walter Pohl (1993, 1997a). The original premise of this book was to inquire whether, removing the eighth-century perspectives of the *HL*, a closer read of contemporary sources could provide a picture of the Lombards as soldiers in the imperial army.

The results diverge strikingly from traditional scholarship. In the first place, the long migration of the Lombards, an important theme in the *HL*, is absent from contemporary sources, first appearing in the mid-seventh century. This evidence does support the connection between Lombards and the Byzantine army—this link brings the early history of the Lombard into a context that is richly informed by sixth and early seventh-century Greek historians. Such evidence allowed for a dialogue between the events of the 560s and similar upheavals involving dissatisfied Byzantine soldiers, not only a few years earlier in Italy (such as Sinduald's rebellion in 565, or Totila's in 541) but also in Africa (such as Stotzas in the 530s). This connection is

highlighted in [Chapter 1](#), which places the Lombards within the social context of the imperial expeditionary army, stressing the shared experience of wars and deprivations of Justinian's campaigns. Curiously, the doubtful story that Narses 'invited' the Lombards to Italy (*HL* 2.5) is confirmed by contemporary evidence: [Chapter 1](#) unveils the sources for the tale and contextualizes it within the experience of sixth-century Byzantine expeditionary forces. [Chapter 2](#) places Alboin in a similar context, as a piece in the chessboard of temporary alliances at the outskirts of the empire. This connection with the military marks the developments of Italian society (and its military organization) from the late sixth century onwards, producing interesting parallels with the evolutions of the Byzantine army in the period, as both [Chapters 3](#) and [5](#) stress. As in the East, the Lombard army shifted from wages to support by landholding, although it is argued here that this system, which was to have a long life in the East, nearly collapsed amongst the Lombards in the mid-seventh century.

Contemporary sources also emphasize the importance of the Franks for the creation of the Lombard kingdom, providing a broader 'international' scope for the event in Italy. While Gallic sources have a distinct Frankish take on the events, they certainly attest to an enduring Frankish presence in northern Italy (confirmed by Byzantine writers such as Procopius and Agathias), a presence that is mostly sidelined in Paul's narrative. This overlordship was first expressed by military interventions, which, as argued in [Chapter 3](#), integrated Lombard Italy into the political system of the Merovingian kingdoms, but was then continued under the aspicces of two generations of strong women of Frankish ascent, first Theudelinda ([Chapters 3](#) and [4](#)) and Gundeperga ([Chapters 4](#) and [5](#)).

This new reading is not intended to be definite, nor claims to have uncovered some hidden truth; it is instead an invitation to think early medieval Italy before Paul the Deacon.

1 The Lombard rebellion

In most textbooks, the establishment of the Lombard Kingdom in Italy in 568/9 follows a well-known narrative. In 535, after defeating the Vandals (533–34), Justinian extended his policy of reclaiming former Byzantine territories to Italy, now setting his eyes on the Ostrogothic Kingdom.¹ Using the death of Amalasuntha as an excuse, he moved the Byzantine army into southern Italy, aiming to thrust northwards towards the Gothic capital in Ravenna. Different from the quick African campaign, the war in Italy dragged on for years, and the Byzantine troops only managed to fully subdue the Goths by 555. The Byzantine grasp of the devastated post-war Italy, however, proved fragile. In 568 (or 569), the Lombards invaded, only to be bogged down in a long protracted war to unify the peninsula, a goal they never accomplished. The resulting stalemate between Byzantine and Lombard forces doomed Italy to political fragmentation, inaugurating the Italian ‘Dark Ages’.

Since the *Risorgimento*, scholars have seen the end of the Ostrogothic Kingdom and the establishment of the Lombards as a major rupture in Italian history. For the nineteenth-century nationalists, the ‘Germanic Lombards’ were then seen as precursors of the Austrians, whose presence in Italy perpetuated the overall political backwardness of the nation.² The Lombards, renowned for their violence and cruelty, devastated the peninsula and enslaved the Romans. Despite their ruthlessness, they were unable to conquer the entire peninsula. Deemed too violent to be contained but too weak to unify Italy, the Lombards were never raised to the status of founders of a nation—as several early medieval *gentes* did elsewhere in nineteenth-century Europe (Geary 2002 15–40; Kulikowski 2007, 43–70). The violence of the Lombard invasion was thought to mark the end of the classical civilization and the beginning of the fragmentation of medieval Italy—a process nineteenth-century Italian nationalists aimed to revert. In the first half of the twentieth century, even if a generation of great early medievalists, such as Gian Piero Bognetti, Ottorino Bertolini, and Giovanni Tabacco, were able to rekindle the interest in the period, the Lombards were hardly given better press (e.g., Bognetti 1966–68; Bertolini 1972; Tabacco 1979).

- 1 Traditionally, 'Roman' is reserved for the period before Justinian, while 'Byzantine' is used for the period following 565. Since this work deals exactly with this period of transition, terminology has been standardized as 'Byzantine'. Quotations, from both primary and secondary sources, have been kept in the original wording.
- 2 For the role of the Lombards in Italian historiography, see Tabacco 1990; Gasparri 2003, 2014, 185–89; Wood 2013, 113–36, 217–20.

In recent years, the impact of the Lombard invasion has been reconsidered. Recent archeological surveys have shown that the rupture in material culture in Italy should be traced not to a catastrophic invasion in 568, but to a slow downturn starting on the fifth century. New research connects the material impoverishment with a general slowdown of Mediterranean economy, intensified by deteriorating weather and plagues (Marazzi 1998; Wickham 1999, 2005, 209ff.). In Italy, Justinian's wars aggravated this trend, crippling productive forces and spreading sorrow, hunger, and tribulation. Thus, when the Lombards finally arrived, the conditions already looked grim (see pp. 64–66). This reassessment of the archeological material came together with a reevaluation of the nature of the Lombard presence in Italy. Historians have begun to question the invasion altogether: instead of a violent conquest, it has been suggested that the Lombards were in Italy, in one form or another, as a result of Roman policy in the region (Christie 1991; Pohl 1993, 1997a, 2001; Everett 2003, 54–99). This fresh narrative has been based on a new understanding of the negotiations between the empire and the various barbarian *gentes* that have recently been depicted in terms of *Integration und Anerkennung*, integration and recognition (Pohl 1997a, 112–29).

Central to this 'negotiated conquest' is the idea that the Lombards were not invaders, but were instead allowed into Italy by imperial authorities. The evidence for this arrangement comes from a number of sources, some as early as the seventh century, which accuse the local commander in chief Narses of inviting the Lombards to take possession of Italy. Narses's 'invitation' has been long known, but scholars tended to dismiss it as gossip.³ These objections notwithstanding, Neil Christie brought back the debate in the 1990s, suggesting the idea of invitation might be grounded in real facts. Even though the invitation as an act of revenge sounds unlikely, he argued, the episode might hide official Byzantine policy. The Lombards had for long been federates of the empire and had occupied Pannonia on imperial grant; it would not be too far-fetched, Christie suggests, to assume a similar relocation to Italy (Christie 1991, 102–06). An authorized settlement, instead of an invasion, would indeed explain why the sources fail to mention any military resistance to the Lombards. The emphasis then shifts from the violent nature of the

Lombards to their connections to the imperial army. This reading fits the new tendency to see the settlement of the barbarians as grounded on the imperial policy of settlement and accommodation, either following the traditional interpretation of *hospitalitas* (transference of land) or Goffart's new model (transference of taxes) (see pp. 58–64). Christie's thesis, however, leaves behind questions on the reliability of the evidence and on how an invitation fits the context of post-Justinianic Italy. This chapter aims to tackle those issues.

- 3 For instance, Hodgkin 1885, vol. 5, 63–5; Hartmann 1897b, 23–4; Schmidt 1969 [1941], 588–9, esp. n. 2; Wickham 1981; Jarnut 1982, 33–6; Tabacco 1979, 94–5; Christou 1991, 108–09, more recently, Gasparri 2011, 75; Borri 2016, 43–46. Some scholars accepted the story of the invitation, but denied its practical impact in the advent of the Lombards, considered still as a straight forward military invasion; see Delogu 1980; Mor 1964, 387. The reading can be traced back to Hegel 1964 [1847], 151–52. Bognetti suggested that the story of the invitation was true, but related to a previous moment, when Justinian had married Auduin to an Ostrogothic princess (cf. Proc. *Bella* 8.25.11–15), which might have given the Lombards the idea they held a legitimate claim to Italy, see Bognetti 1966–68, 50–51.

Invasion or invitation?

When Paul the Deacon composed his *Historia Langobardorum* (*HL*), Narses's 'invitation' was part of the Lombard tradition, already figuring in surviving texts in the seventh century. Paul indeed knew quite well some of these texts, which he wove into an elegant story explaining how (and why) the Lombards ended up in Italy. It is that well-crafted tale that most scholars have favored, trusting Paul to iron out the wrinkles of other sources into a smooth narrative. The result, as Francesco Mores has rightly put it, is the 'typical use of Paul's narrative: what Paul says and what happened mostly coincide' (Mores 2013, 214). This modern reliance on Paul turns the *HL* into a necessary starting point.

Paul the Deacon and the arrival of the Lombards in Italy

The Lombard invasion is the main event of the second book of the *HL*, which starts with cooperation between Narses and the Lombards (*HL* 2.1) and ends with the destruction of Italy by the unruly Lombard dukes (*HL* 2.32). This narrative arc was described by Walter Goffart (1988, 388–94) as tragedy, a verdict that mostly stands. Paul carefully laid out the sources he had at his disposal to build a narrative of

Roman sin and redemption, and of the fall of human endeavor by lust.⁴ The story starts with Alboin's successes and reputation, which led Narses to ask him for help against Totila. The Lombards were then living in Pannonia and were allied to the empire (*HL* 2.1).⁵ In Italy, Narses was victorious, first against the Franks and later against the usurpation of Sinduald (*HL* 2.2–3). He was a good Christian and a man of great virtue: he won battles more by prayers than by feats of arms (*HL* 2.3). Italy flourished under him. The good times were, however, soon to change. A pestilence engulfed the country, especially Liguria (*HL* 2.4). More telling, the plague preyed only on the Romans: it was a harbinger of the tragedy they were about to unleash. Paul misplaced the plague (which happened a few years after the advent of the Lombards) to highlight the sinfulness of the Romans and to show how God had opened the way to the Lombards.⁶

4 Hence, the brave Narses had reconquered Italy from the Goths, but was demoted by the jealousy of the Romans; the brave Alboin replaced him in Italy without bloodshed, but was killed by his hubris and his resentful wife. The book can be divided in two major parts: (1) the tragedy of Narses (2.1–8) and (2) the tragedy of Alboin (2.30–32). In between (2.9–29) we have the description of Italy and Alboin's conquests of the provinces. For a similar view—though with a different division—see Goffart 1988, 388–94.

5 This information Paul obtained from Jordanes, *Romana*, 386–87.

6 For the dating of the plague, Mar. Av. s.a. 570–71; *Exc. Sang.* 570, 1988, 389.

The second act of this tragedy confirms the iniquity of the Romans when, out of sheer jealousy, they turned their backs on the devout Narses. Paul shows how they petitioned emperor Justin and his wife Sophia to remove him. 'It would have been better for the Romans' they said 'to serve the Goths rather than the Romans as long as Narses is in command and oppresses us with servitude.' The Byzantine court took the threat seriously and Justin sent Longinus right away to replace Narses. The commander, having heard of the news, was terrified; he dared not return to Constantinople and face empress Sophia because she 'is said to have told him that she would put him together with the girls, to weave'. And to this, Narses answered he would weave such a web that the queen would never be able to lay aside (*HL* 2.5; cf. Fred. 3.65). Moved by hate and fear, Narses fled to Naples and, still according to Paul, 'soon sent messengers to the Lombards, urging them to abandon the poor fields of Pannonia, and come take possession of Italy, bustling with all kinds of wealth'. As an incentive, he sent a sample of the many riches of the Italian countryside. Immediately, terrible signs appear in the skies, a foreboding of the blood that would be shed (*HL* 2.5).⁷ Receiving the invitation, Alboin moved his people from Pannonia into Italy,

gathering wives and children, not before agreeing with the Huns (i.e., the Avars) that if eventually the Lombards needed to return, they could have their fields back (*HL* 2.7).

Earlier and near contemporary sources

Paul's vivid picture cannot be fully reproduced by the surviving sixth- and seventh-century evidence. No sixth-century Italian source for the events of 568–69 survived. The earliest evidence mentioning the invasion are two late sixth-century Gallic texts, namely Gregory of Tours's *Histories* and Marius of Avenches's *Chronicle*, both composed in the late 580s–early 590s.⁸ Shortly after, John of Biclarum produced a continuation of the chronicle of Victor of Tunnuna, which he finished around 603;⁹ after that, Isidore wrote his *Chronicle*, which he finished probably in 615, with a new edition in 626 (Martín 2003, 13–20).¹⁰ The anonymous *Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper (CH)* was produced in northern Italy around 641 (or as early as 625).¹¹ And finally, from around 660s, there is the *Chronicle* attributed to Fredegar, whose third book, albeit a continuation of Gregory's *Histories*, also incorporated material from other sources.¹² Harder to date is the *Liber Pontificalis (LP)*, which preserves much material from the late sixth and early seventh century. The papal biographies were often put together shortly after the death of each pope, but the date of composition of specific *Vitae* is harder to establish, especially for late sixth- and early-seventh century popes. For the sixth-century *Vitae*, the historiographical consensus points to a composition around 640.¹³ Also hard to date is the *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, originally an expansion of the list of kings at the prologue of Rothari's *Edict* (643) (see pp. 152–53). Given that Paul used the work extensively and that the text survives in no manuscript prior to the tenth century, it is impossible to tell to which extent the *Origo* has been contaminated back by the *HL*.¹⁴ The text has been dated to the 670s–680s,¹⁵ but since the integrity of the text is dubious, it is hard to know how much to rely on this date. Of these texts, only Isidore, the *LP*, the *CH*, and the *Origo* contained the invitation.

7 Nick Everett (2003, 65–66) has pointed out that the offer of riches is a classical topos. The signs in the sky came from Greg. *Dial.* 3.38, cf. Greg. *Homil. in Ev.*

8 Gregory finished his *Histories* around 590 (Murray 2008). On Gregory of Tours, see also Nie 1987; Goffart 1988, 112–234; Heinzelmann 2001. Marius finished his work at some point between his last entry (581) and his death (593) (Favrod 1991).

9 The classical introduction for the work of John Biclarum is Mommsen's introductory remarks to the MGH edition (AA XI, 207–10). See also Teillet

- 1984, 428–55; Wolf 1990, 1–10; Collins 1995, 42. More recently, see the new edition by Cardelle de Hartmann and Collins 2001, 2002.
- 10 On Isidore, see Bassett 1976, esp. 65–132; Wolf 1990, 11–24; Martín 2002; Wood and Koon 2008; Wood 2012; Burgess and Kulikowski 2013, 199–201.
 - 11 On the *Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper*, see esp. Muhlberger 1984, 1998; Everett 2003, 86–87; Lo Monaco 2012; Borri 2014, 45–49. For the dating, see Fabbro forthcoming-b cf. Muhlberger 1984.
 - 12 On Fredegar, see Goffart 1963; Wood 1994a; Collins 2007; Reimitz 2015, 166–239; Lake 2015.
 - 13 On the composition of the *Liber Pontificalis*, the introductions to the almost simultaneous editions by Mommsen and Duchesne are still fundamental; see L. Duchesne *Le Liber Pontificalis*, Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1886 and MGH, *Gesta Pontificum Romanorum*, ed. Th. Mommsen, 1898. More recently, see; Pohl 2004a; Capo 2009; Bougard and Sot 2009; Gasparri 2012, 146ff.
 - 14 The *Origo* is preserved in four late tenth- to early-eleventh-century manuscripts, one of which, the *Codex Gothanus*, has a somewhat rewritten and interpolated version, taking the story to the ninth century. See Everett 2003, 92–98, for a different contextualization, Bracciotti 1998, see also Pohl 2000a, and now; Plassmann 2006, 204–06; Coumert 2007, 153–57; Delogu 2009, 260–61; Pohl 2012; Borri 2014.
 - 15 The last assessment has suggested a possible composition under Perctarit (672–88); for this dating, see Pohl 2012, 184; 2003a, Gasparri 1992; Coumert 2007, 153–57; Borri 2014, 52.

How much of this material can be considered primary sources? Only Gregory of Tours, Marius of Avenches, and John of Biclarum were alive to have witnessed the events of the late 570s. Gregory and Marius, however, were on the other side of the Alps and are thus not primary sources. Since there is no evidence they had access to each other's work and their wording on the Italian affairs is often quite similar,¹⁶ it is safe to assume the information came from a common source, a source labeled here 'consular source'. John was also not in Italy. Living in Constantinople, he was indeed an eyewitness to how the Lombards were perceived in the East, but less so for the actual events in Italy. Neither John nor (most likely) the source behind Marius and Gregory, however, mention the 'invitation', suggesting yet another source convened the story. This source accounts for the similarities on the independent reports in Isidore's *Chronicle* and the *LP*, and is called here 'chronicle source I'.¹⁷ The remaining sources are all undisputedly secondary. Table 1.1 shows the sources for the Lombard invasion.

Table 1.1 Sources for the Lombard Invasion

(1) John of Biclarum's *Chronicle*: John, who lived in Constantinople from 567 to 578,¹⁸ was well positioned to gather information about the imperial policies in Italy. If the Italian provinces, which the empire had struggled for decades to reclaim, had been ravaged and

lost to a new barbarian invasion, the news would certainly hit Constantinople hard. John, however, not only fails to mention the Lombards moving into Italy but actually attests them in Pannonia until at least 570, when they are said to have destroyed the Gepids (Joh. Bicl. s. a. 572.1)—John’s chronology is especially hard to pin down and this date should be taken with a grain of salt, but he is never off by more than two years (see p. 47, n.8). For the matter at hand, John’s report seems to be independent from the other sources and based on an Eastern perception of the event and, as far as John shows, the Lombards moving into Italy was not a significant event.¹⁹

- 16 For Marius’s sources, Favrod 1991, 27–35; for Gregory, Oldoni 1972; for the possibility of reliable Byzantine sources, see Cameron 1975. The similarities between Marius and Gregory produced a long debate on whether Marius used Gregory (Binding 1868, 154, n. 529) or Gregory used Marius (Monod 1872, t. II, 161). The debate was finally settled by referring to a common source, which was usually called *Annales Burgondes* (Kurth 1919, 221; Oldoni 1972, 578–83). Vinay (1940, 206–44), unconvinced of the ‘Burgundian’ context, advocated for a general ‘Frankish’ origin.
- 17 For the ‘chronicle source II’, see Ch. 4.
- 18 The date is based on Isidore’s biography of John in *De viris illustribus*, 44. The chronology is, however, unclear, since John’s exile (and education) in Constantinople is rendered in some MSS as starting at his ‘septimo decimo anno’, while other MSS render ‘septimo demum anno’. In the introduction to his edition, Mommsen opted for the former, and suggested 567 to 576 (*MGH AA* 11, 207–10); Condoñer (1972, 114, see also Cardelle de Hartmann and Collins 2002, 37, and n. 43), more familiar with the textual tradition of *De viris*, preferred the latter, dating the exile to 570/1 to 577/8. Other dates have indeed been suggested: 558–75 (Campos 1960, 17–25), c.559–76 (Wolf 1990, 1), and c.562–79 (Collins 1995, 42).
- 19 Note also that the other surviving Greek sources of the period also fail to mention the Lombard invasion/invitation; for example, the work of Menander, the last Greek historian who, at least apparently, included Italy, came to us in fragments, and no assertion can be made of the full content of his work. Later historians, as John of Ephesus or Theophylact Simocatta, are focused almost exclusively on the East.

(2) The ‘consular source’: this source did not survive and has to be reconstructed, mostly from its usage in Marius of Avenches and Gregory of Tours. Given its dependency on a consular/indiction system for dating, it is labeled here ‘consular source’, and it presumably consisted of a consular list similar to Marcellinus Comes’s *Chronicon*. The existence of such text has indeed been suggested as a source for Marius of Avenches, to account for his entries on Italy from 532 up to 579.²⁰ The ‘consular source’ was finished at some point after 579 and certainly before 593, when Marius died (Favrod 1991, 14–15). The ‘consular source’ might also have been used in a marginal note on the *CH*.²¹ Texts dependent on the ‘consular source’ are shown

Table 1.2 Texts Dependent on the ‘Consular Source’

Mar. Av. s.a. 569	Hist. 4.41	HL 2.7	CH. (marg.)
That year, Alboin, king of the Lombards, <i>leaving and burning all Pannonia</i> , his fatherland, <i>with wives and all his people</i> occupied Italy in <i>fara</i> . And there some were killed by disease, some were killed by hunger, others (<i>nonnulli</i>) by the sword.	Alboin, king of the Lombards, who had for his wife Chlothosind, the daughter of Chlothar, <i>abandoned his own region</i> , sought out Italy. Once the army was assembled, they set off <i>with wives and children</i> , planning to dwell there. Once they entered the country, they wandered for almost seven years, despoiling churches, killing priests, and submitted the region to their power.	Then the Lombards, <i>abandoning Pannonia</i> , advanced to take possession of Italy <i>with their wives and children, and all their belongings</i> .	In the fifth year of Justin, the Lombards entered Italy.

Three points characterize the ‘consular source’: its dating system, the emphasis on the immigration, and references to Alboin. The ‘consular source’, as mentioned above, relied first on consular, then regnal, dates, including the indiction: Marius of Avenches dates the advent of the Lombards to the second indiction, and the third consulate of Justin (569), and the *marginalia* in the *Copenhagen Continuation* points to the fifth year of Justin II, i.e. 569/70 (Mar. Av. s. a. 569; CH 1520); Gregory of Tours does not give a precise date because the event falls in the section of his *Histories* that preceded his rigorous set of annals based on the reign of Childebert II, beginning Christmas 575 (Murray 2016, 66–68).²² Second, both Gregory’s and Marius’s accounts suggest that the ‘consular source’ described the Lombards leaving Pannonia, and moving into Italy not as a *razzia* but bringing their families with the intention of settlement (Marius states the Lombards ‘occupied [*occupavit*] Italy’, while Gregory uses ‘sought [*petiit*] for Italy’, which could have a hostile meaning, but need not have). They also added that some destruction followed the process (more for Gregory, less for Marius). Marius, in addition to that, is the only one to suggest the Lombards occupied Italy in *fara*, a military detachment.²³ Neither Gregory nor Marius mentions Narses’s involvement in any capacity. The attention to the impact of the Lombards, combined with the ignorance about the interplay in Rome

involving Narses, suggests the ‘consular source’ was composed in northern Italy, the first region exposed to the Lombards. A northern origin would also explain why this source was used prominently by Gallic (and northern Italian) authors. Finally, it is the ‘consular source’ that records information about Alboin, whom both Gregory and Marius registered commanding the Lombards.

- 20 Favrod (1991, 28–29) suggests Marius used this source for the following entries: s.aa. 532, 534.2, 535, 538, 540.1–2, 548.2, 553, 554, 555.4, 566.2 and 4, 567, 569.1, 572, 573.1, 579.
- 21 GKS 454, fol. 40v, (Copenhagen).
- 22 The fragment of Secundus also dates the advent of the Lombards to the second indiction (i.e., 569), to which he added the month, May. The *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, c. 5, suggests a three-phased occupation, starting with a migration on 1 April 568 (first indiction), followed by the beginning of attacks in the next year ([Langobardi] coeperunt preadare in Italia’), and finally by control ([Alboin] factus est dominus Italiae’). Although, as mentioned above, the *Origo* is hard to date, it was probably the most important source for Paul’s narrative of the conquest, and from where he got 568 as an initial date. Paul changed the day from 1 April to 2 April, so as not to have the Lombards entering Italy during Easter, which he considered impious (compare with Paul’s reproach of Stilicho’s attack on Alaric during Easter in *Historia Romana* 12.13). The *Origo* also mentions Narses and the invitation, but it is impossible to establish whether it was dependent on Isidore, the *LP*, or even if the extant version was contaminated by Paul’s *HL*.
- 23 Mar. Av. s.a. 569.

The composition in the 580s, the dating style, and the northern Italian scope point to a known albeit lost text: Secundus of Trent’s *historiola*.²⁴ Secundus’s work survives only in a short fragment containing what seems to be the *explicit* preserved in a twelfth-century manuscript, and in Paul’s use of the work in the *HL*.²⁵ The snippet gives the place of composition, Non (near Trento), and the date, 580. The dating style matches what was suggested for the ‘consular source’: it was finished ‘in the twelfth year of the Lombards in Italy, who entered in the second indiction (569) in the month of May (...) the first year of Tiberius’s reign, in the month of June, thirteenth indiction’; that is, 580. The extent to which Paul used Secundus is unknown and of his three mentions of the author (*HL* 3.29, 4.27, and 4.40), the first refers to an event Secundus did *not* report, while the other two are biographical. Nowhere did Paul indicate material coming from the *historiola*, as he did, for instance, for Gregory of Tours (*HL* 3.1) or Venantius Fortunatus (*HL* 2.13). Scholars have nonetheless attributed to Secundus a number of entries in the *HL* from 568 (*HL* 2.7) up to 612 (*HL* 4.40), particular for their careful dating (Jacobi 1877, 55–84; Gardiner 1983; Carvani 1986; Pohl 2004b, 2007b, 246–51; Borri 2014, 43–45). That Secundus was responsible

for those entries, however, is hard to reconcile with the *explicit*, which suggests Secundus ended his work at 580. More damning, the last dated entry refers to Secundus’s own death in 612. Since Jacobi, the solution has been to attribute this final entry to a continuator and completely ignore the *explicit* (or rely on it simply for bibliographical notice on Secundus) (Jacobi 1877, 79, similarly Gardiner 1983, 152; Pohl 2004b, 639). If the *explicit* is taken into account—and there is no compelling reason to dismiss it—it is more likely that a continuator worked from 580 on, a fact likely also Paul ignored.²⁴ Whether the ‘consular source’ was indeed Secundus is impossible to establish, but it remains a tempting possibility.

- 24 Probably not the actual title of Secundus’s work, but that is how Paul the Deacon introduces it (*HL* 4.40); Zecchini (2009, 96–98) infers a bit too much from the term.
- 25 The lines preserved read: ‘A principio usque ad passionem Domini sunt anni 5229, passo Christo usque in presentem annum sunt 554, et a presente pascha iuxta prophete eloquium, secundum quod humane fragilitati datur capere intellectum, restant de presenti seculo anni 217. Et in hoc supra memorato anno fuit bissextus, residentibus in Italia Langobardis ann. 12, eo quod secunda indictione in ea ingressi sunt mense Maio. Acta sunt supra scripta omnia in civitate Tridentina in loco Anagnis, presedente Agnello episcopo anno 3 expleto. Ego Secundus servus Christi scripsi hec conversionis sacre relegionis mee anno 15, imperii Tiberii anno primo, mense Iunio, indict. 13 [580].’ (In *SRL*, 25, n. 3, for the dating of the MS, see *SRL*, 25, n. 4). See Leicht 1906. The fragment has been read in different ways: Bethmann suggested the ‘acta sunt supra scripta omnia’ as pointing to a charter or the act of a Synod; see Bethmann 1849, 350, followed by Leicht 1906, 28–29. Bethmann’s conclusion, generally accepted to this day, fails to account for the chronicle-like dating (starting with the beginning of times), as well as the ‘hoc supra memorato anno’, which seems to point to a lengthier report.
- 26 For this continuation, see pp. 108–12.

(3) The third source, also non-extant, was possibly a chronicle organized by reigns, and hence called here the ‘chronicle source I’. This source mentions Narses and his ‘invitation’, but preserves no reference to Alboin. All seventh-century sources that depict the advent of the Lombards (with the exception of the prologue of Rothari’s *Edict*) report the story, depending, presumably, on this source. The two oldest surviving texts are the *LP* and the first edition of Isidore’s *Chronicle* (615/16) (see [Table 1.3](#)).

Table 1.3 Chronicle Source I

Texts dependent on the ‘chronicle source’	Reception	
<i>LP</i> V.Iohan. III. 63.3 & V. Bened. 64.1	Bede, <i>Chr. Mai</i> s.a. 523	<i>HL</i> 2.5

Now, the *Chronicle*, the *Gotthar-Nachrichten*, and the *Notitia* have been thrown, as has been said,

and, on being asked to justify his envy of the Roman [i.e., the Franks and Siduald] had
 and Sophia, a man who had quenched his thirst with the milk of the Romans, for whom he
 benefited in the Roman kingdom, and urged the Greeks, of the Romans, for whom he
 had done good things, against the enemies of the Roman Justin. Justin made insinuations against
 Greeks, the names of Justin and his wife Sophia, saying in these words, *It would*
be a fine benefit to the Romans to see the city of Italy in the hands of the Greeks, as the eunuch Narses
submitted to the Romans, and with his own hands, and with the sword, the most devout emperor ignores:
either the sword of his hands or the city of Italy in the hands of the city of Roma and ourselves to
ignore them. When Narses wrote to the Lombards, so
 when this has been read he answered briefly with these words: 'If I have done
 harm to the Romans, then I will find myself of Italy.'

*I have done harm to the
 Romans, harm I will find
 myself.* Thus, Narses, after
 he left Rome, came to
 Campania, and wrote to the
 Lombards, so that they would
 come and take possession of
 Italy. Once pope Iohannis
 learnt that they had sent his
 suggestions against Narsis
 to the emperor, he rushed
 to Naples, and started to
 beg Narses to come back to
 Rome. Narses then said:
 'tell me, most holy pope,
 what evil have I done to the
 Romans? I will go to the
 feet of the one who sent
 me, and let all Italy learn
 how I worked with all
 strength for her.' The pope
 replied: 'I will go myself,
 before you leave this land.'
 Narses returned to Rome
 with the pope. (...) Narses
 actually died many years
 after he returned to Rome,
 and his body was placed in
 a bronze urn, and was
 returned with all his wealth
 to Constantinople. (...)

[During Benedict's
 pontificate], the Lombards
 invaded all Italy at the
 same time as there was also
 great famine, so that
 furthermore, a multitude of
 fortresses surrendered to
 the Lombards to escape the
 misery of hunger.

[Under Justin], the Patrician Narses, after he triumphed in Italy over Totila, the Gothic king, during the reign of Justinian, was *terrified by the threats of the empress Sophia, and invited the Lombards from Pannonia, and allowed them into Italy.* (...) [Under Tiberius], after the Romans were expelled, the Lombards captured Italy.

The Patrician Narses, when he was administering prosperously Italy for twelve years, and when he was restoring the cities and the fortifications to their pristine glory and fostering its people with law and wisdom, *became terrified of the threats of the empress Sophia, wife of Justin, and disturbed by threats and reproaches of the ignoble woman, invited Alboin, king of the Lombards, with all his army from Pannonia.*

Not long after [the Lombards had moved to Pannonia], the Patrician Narses, was *terrified by the threats of the emperor Justin and the empress Sophia.* Because Narses was a eunuch, the empress sent him a device, made of gold, with which women could do their spinning, and so he might lord it over spinners not a people. To such, he answered: 'A thread I shall spin of which neither the emperor Justin nor the empress will ever reach the end of.' *Thus, inviting the Lombards from Pannonia, brought them under their king Alboin into Italy.*

Although both texts include the 'invitation', there are significant differences. For the *LP*, the invitation was the result of a chain of events that started with a petition from the Romans to Justin and Sophia, to which Narses replied by leaving Rome to explain himself to the emperor and by inviting, for some undisclosed reason, the Lombards. The pope, however, managed to dissuade Narses from leaving, and led him back to Rome. The 'invitation', however, is not directly connected with the Lombard invasion per se, which, according to the *LP*, took place only later, at some point during the pontificate of pope Benedict (575–79) (*LP*, Vita Iohannis, 63.3; Vita Benedicti 64.1). Overall, the *LP* is generous towards Narses, who received a pep talk from the pope and ended his life in peace in Rome. Indeed, the old general had a good rapport with the Church, having even intervened with the imperial court for the liberation of the then exiled pope Virgilius (537–55) (*LP*, Vita Virgilii, 61.8), and is overall painted as a pious man.²⁷ The portrait in Isidore is less flattering. In his *Chronicle*, what prompted Narses was not a petition and his sense of duty, but instead his fear of the threats he received from the empress—a motif absent in the *LP* (Isidore, *Chr. Mai.* 402). Curiously, in the second edition of the *Chronicle* (626), Isidore removed the invitation and added the conquest of Italy, not in 568/9 but under Tiberius (578–82).

The accounts of the invitation in seventh-century sources depend mostly on Isidore, even though both Fredegar and the *CH* possibly also had access to the *LP*. Fredegar, in his version of the story, added the

wordplay based on a weaving motif that would later be appropriated by Paul the Deacon (*HL* 2.5). The sources that depend directly on the *LP*, namely Bede's *Chronicle* and Paul the Deacon's *HL*, are all from the eighth century (see [Table 1.3](#)).

Comparison between the *LP* and Isidore's *Chronicle* raises the question of the relationship between the two texts. It is certain that Isidore did not use the *LP*, whose segments on the late sixth century were probably composed a few decades after the *Chronicle* (see p. 12, n.13). Jose Carlos Martí has recently suggested that the Italian material in the passages from 401 to 404 in Isidore's first edition came instead from a 'chronique italienne inconnue de nos jours', a lost Italian chronicle (Martín 2003, 33). Conversely, the use of Isidore's *Chronicle* by the *LP* is hard to substantiate. As for the content, both texts agree that the 'invitation' was the reason the Lombards got into Italy in the first place, but disagree on what motivated it. Both sources also uncouple the 'invitation' and the later invasion, which in both takes place a few years after the invitation. The details of this 'invasion' vary somewhat: for Isidore, 'the Romans were expelled' under Tiberius (578–82), while for the *LP* a 'multitude of fortresses surrendered to the Lombards' during the pontificate of Benedict (575–79).

It could be suggested that Isidore and the hagiographers of the *LP* had access to different (primary?) sources, from which they obtained the essential information on the invitation and the divergent information on Narses's motivations and on the subsequent conquest. The similarities in the texts, however, make it more likely that both worked from a singular source—Martín's *chronique italienne*, here 'chronicle source I'. For instance, although both sources mention the empress Sophia, only in Isidore is she a necessary character. The fact that the *LP* preserved the reference to the empress, even though she plays no role in its version of the story, might suggest that the text the hagiographers had in hand mentioned the empress, whose involvement was otherwise only reported by Isidore. The *LP* hagiographers possibly chose to omit this bit of information from their rather positive account of Narses. The information on the petition of the Roman against Narses was likely also added by the *LP*. The story might be grounded on the unrest during the late 560s, but in the way the *LP* presents it, the petition effectively switches the blame from Narses to the 'envy of the Romans'. The *LP* also included information on Narses's fate, material apparently unavailable to Isidore. The 'chronicle source I' also preserved no further information after the 'invitation'; notably, it was silent about a 'conquest', about which Isidore and the *LP* relied on different sources.

This information reveals the basic lines of the ‘chronicle source I’. The text had notice of Narses’s ‘invitation’ together with his fear of the empress. It expressed a view that was not fully supported by the Church in Rome, which had to tinker with the story to partially exculpate Narses (although the ‘invitation’ itself was presumably too well known to be simply denied). When it comes to the ensuing chaos in northern Italy recorded by the ‘consular source’, it is safe to assume that the ‘chronicle source I’ did not mention it. Both the *LP* and Isidore add developments on the Lombards later on, but their source was no longer the same. Isidore inserted a Lombard invasion only in his 626 edition, possibly using John of Biclarum’s *Chronicle* (to which he had no access while working on the first edition), and placed it under Tiberius (578–82). The *LP* has the invasion during the pontificate of Benedict (575–79), placing it thus in the last years of Justin; the source is unknown.

When the ‘chronicle source I’ was composed remains the subject of speculation. The only rigid *terminus ante quem* is Isidore’s *Chronicle*, hence, 615. However, the source Isidore used in the early 610s presumably had no information on Italy under Tiberius (since Isidore added the conquest to his reign only later on), which could produce a possible *terminus ante quem* to c.578–82. Moreover, given that the entry for 569 (that is, the invitation) is the last information Isidore had on Italy in 615/16 (to which his later edition only added the conquest), it is tempting to push back the composition to some point in the earlier 570s. Another interesting detail is that Alboin is not mentioned, suggesting the ‘chronicle source I’ was finished before Alboin became a name worth mentioning. This absence argues not only for an earlier date of composition of the ‘chronicle source I’ but also for the fact that Alboin’s trajectory in the north was not as straightforward as Paul suggests (see [Chapter 2](#)).

A possible context for this chronicle—or, at any rate, for the invitation story in its original form—might have been Ravenna under Longinus (c.568–574/75), the praetorian prefect sent by Justin to replace Narses.²⁸ One might conjecture that, once the Lombards got out of hand in the north, the government in Ravenna chose to scapegoat Narses, who had incorporated the Lombards in the first place—and who had since, at least according to the *LP*, retired in Rome (and might have been already dead)—and attributed his actions to his cowardice: the eunuch who was afraid of a woman.

Summing up the evidence for the ‘Lombard invasion’ in the earlier sources, three fundamental points emerge. First, the Lombards entered Italy in an organized movement, prompted by an ‘invitation’ coming

from the then commander in chief of Italy, Narses. This official ‘invitation’ helps explain the lack of organized resistance. Marius’s mention of *fara* as the form by which the Lombards occupied Italy further supports the idea that they were invited in as organized military detachments (see pp. 62–63). This movement of troops most likely happened in 569, the date preserved by the ‘consular source’, although given that it was not an invasion, there was no single event that could establish a firm initial date, as the ‘invited’ troops took some time to move into Italy.²⁹ Second, this policy produced no especial reaction in Constantinople, or at least none that John of Biclarum cared to report. As far as can be said for John’s *Chronicle*, nothing happened in that time that changed the status of Italy (nor indeed the status of the Lombards in Pannonia, who were still in place to destroy the Gepids a few years later). Finally, at about the same time the Lombards started to cause friction in northern Italy, soon escalating into violence, which left a clear impression in the ‘consular source’.

Enlisting the Lombards

Narses’s ‘invitation’, although strange, is thus well grounded on the sources, as is the chaos that followed it. If, as suggested above, the ‘chronicle source I’ was actually produced under Longinus, the invitation is a near-contemporary reading of one of the imperial policies for Italy that turned out to have tragic, unforeseeable consequences. But what policy was that? How did it go wrong? The sources provide no further detail. The historian must thus turn to the context to try to piece together what Narses’s ‘invitation’ could have been. Neil Christie, in the article mentioned in the previous section, suggested a possible context. He argues that Narses’s ‘invitation’ as an act of revenge should indeed be dismissed as gossip but suggests the ‘invitation’ reveals official policy from Constantinople. Namely, the Byzantine authorities intended the Lombards to repopulate the Alpine and Padane regions, remediating thus the lack of manpower, especially for the army. Christie suggests correctly that the Byzantines had used the Lombards before in a similar capacity, when Justinian settled them in portions of Pannonia and Noricum. The Lombards were to be resettled in Venetia, in order not only to create a buffer zone between Italy and the Avars but also to keep the tricapitoline sympathizer in the region in check. Once in Italy, however, the Lombards turned against the empire—their offensive thrust came to a standstill around the year 600, resulting in the division of the peninsula between Lombard and Byzantine areas (Christie 1991, 102–07).

- 28 Contemporary references on Longinus are extremely meager, restricted to a reference in an inscription in Ravenna (*CIL* XI, 317). Later sources: *Origo* c. 5; *HL* 2.29–30; Agn. 95–96; see plre iiib, *Longinus* 5 (p. 797).
- 29 For an estimate of the distances in Italy and how long it would take to transfer all the troops, see Mor 1964.

Upon a closer analysis, Christie's reading presents a number of problems. It is very unlikely that the imperial government would allow the Lombards into a recently acquired territory on similar terms used in Pannonia, a no-man's-land that had not been held directly by the Romans for a while.³⁰ Such concession would be especially unlikely given Justin's policy of a strong hand against barbarians (Jones 1964a, 304ff). It is also hard to accept that they would set the then mostly pagan Lombards to suppress the schismatic Christians in Venetia, even if Alboin had shown signs of converting.³¹

The argument here is different. Christie is right to suggest the Italian army was short on manpower, but settling barbarians into Byzantine-controlled territories was hardly a conceivable solution. Instead, Narses would more likely try to replenish the numbers of the army in the traditional way, by getting new recruits. The case made here is that Narses's 'invitation' of the Lombards was an enlistment campaign: Narses was resupplying the Italian army in the same way previous armies had been supplied, that is, by enlisting barbarians and Roman provincials. This group of fresh recruits, which included the Lombards, was moved into Italy by official orders, invited, one could say, and was intended to bring the Italian army up to strength. Faced with the real conditions of service, these recruits rebelled against the empire, not unlike a number of mid-sixth-century armies. This section presents the evidence for the 'invitation' as conscription; the next one presents possible causes for 'rebellion'.

The 552 army

To understand how Narses replenished the army in 568—and why he needed to replenish it in the first place—one must look back a few years to the beginning of Narses's campaign in Italy in 552.³² The 552 army was collected in the Balkans and in the Danubian region and is the best model available to reconstruct a supposed 568 army—especially because Procopius covered this recruitment campaign in detail. The empire put together the 552 army to open a new front against the insurgency that had swept Italy since late 540. Although Justinian's 'Gothic War' is usually seen as ending only after the final defeat of the Goths in 554, the Byzantine invasion of 535 ended in victory in May 540, when the Gothic government collapsed and the imperial troops marched into Ravenna.³³ The Goths capitulated on the

understanding that Belisarius would claim sovereignty over Italy and be proclaimed ‘emperor of the West’, a deal to which Belisarius pretended to agree but never intended to follow (*Proc. Bella* 6.29.18, 27, 6.30). In summer 540, he sailed back to Constantinople, bringing with him the defeated Gothic king Vitigis (*Bella* 6.30.29–7.1.1–2). Belisarius’s continuous proofs of loyalty notwithstanding, Justinian relocated the general without delay and reestablished a civilian government in Italy (*Bella* 6.30.1–3, cf. *Pragmatica Sanctio*). The new administration, obsessed with rebalancing the budget, quickly turned the population against the empire, rekindling thoughts of independence (*Bella* 7.1.28–33). Less than a year after Belisarius had left, the remaining Goths combined forces with dissatisfied Byzantine soldiers to oppose the imperial administration—the next section suggests this movement was a rebellion rather than a ‘Gothic revival’ (*Bella* 7.1.25–27, 37, see pp. 38–39). The uprising started around Pavia but quickly spread to Liguria and Veneto, bringing the local people to the Goths’ side (*Bella* 7.2.28). After some initial internal struggle, the rebels elected Totila as their commander (and thus new ‘Gothic king’) (*Bella* 7.1.37–2.18). Totila turned out to be extremely successful and in the following decade (541–550) he reclaimed most of the Byzantine-controlled areas.

- 30 For the general context of the Balkans, see Amory 1997, 277–313. The Lombard kingdom on Pannonia, though scarcely attested in contemporary sources (mainly by Procopius and Jordanes), has received significant attention in scholarship, mostly based on later legendary material. The connection between the policy in the Balkans and the posterior kingdom in Italy remains, to my eyes, more elusive than often stated. For scholarship on the Pannonian kingdom (often with substantial support from eighth-century literary material), see Werner 1962; Bóna 1974, 1990; Jarnut 1982, 19–26; Menghin 1985, 21–84; Christie 1995, 31–68.
- 31 For the religion of the Lombards, Fanning 1981; Everett 2003, 59–65; Brown 2009.
- 32 On Narses, see now Stewart 2017, 44–49.
- 33 For the main narrative of Justinian’s wars, see Moorhead 1994; Evans 1996, and more recently, Moorhead 2008, 203–09. On Belisarius, see Hughes 2009; Börm 2013. On Procopius, see Stein 1949, vol. 2, 709–23; Evans 1972; Kaegi 1990; Cameron 1996. More recently, see Kaldellis 2004 (but cf. Greatrex 2003); Croke 2003, 391–417; Treadgold 2007, 176–226; Greatrex 2014; Whately 2016.

In the spring of 552, Justinian sent Narses with a large expeditionary army to counter this uprising (Rance 2005, 443–51). Similarly to other expeditionary forces, this army relied on large-scale enlistment campaigns to supplement the regular troops.³⁴ These campaigns would attract volunteers, either to join the entourage of powerful commanders as *bucellarii*, or to be hired by the state in the guise of *foederati* (see pp. 27–28). Voluntary enrollment, especially

from barbarian nations, accounted for the bulk of the troops, especially among the crack units. Whenever there was a need of fresh troops, generals went to the traditional recruiting grounds—like Isauria or the Balkans—offering money (e.g., Proc. *Bella* 5.27.1–2, 7.10.1–3, 12.4, 39.9–16). A tough peasant population and a well-established martial tradition made these areas important reservoirs of military manpower. In the Balkans, the local mountaineer population also included several groups of barbarian *gentes* that had moved across the Danube since the fifth century. By the sixth century, the Balkans had become a gray zone, administratively still part of the empire, but socially controlled by many different military groups that went under several affiliations, ethnic and otherwise—Goths, Gepids, Lombards. It is indeed this military potential that accounts for the instability of the region, since although these groups often fought for the empire under the guise of ‘allied troops’ or *foederati*, they fought as often for usurpers and barbarian leaders across the Danube. They were military men in search of work, in the service of either Constantinople or a successful local military commander. Either way, they would be dealing with a contractor offering money in exchange for military service.³⁵

34 More generally on the late Roman/early Byzantine army, see Grosse 1920; Jones 1964a, 607–86; Treadgold 1995; Southern and Dixon 1996; Elton 1996; Haldon 1999, and more recently, Parnell 2017, 13–33.

35 There is much literature on barbarians in the Roman army. See, for instance, Teall 1965; Elton 1996, 15–88; Parnell 2015, 2017, 33–76, but see also the reservations in Amory 1997; Halsall 2007, 101–10. For the military culture on the Balkans, see Amory 1997, esp. 280, Heather 1991, 225–308. More generally, on the social and political conditions in the Balkans, see Curta 2001, esp. 120–89; Liebeschuetz 2007; Whitby 2007; Sarantis 2016b, esp. 113–226.

That is the context of the army put together in 550 under the command of Germanus, Justinian’s nephew. Justinian had then few troops to spare, but, according to Procopius, he handed Germanus a great sum of money so that he could recruit in Thrace and Illyria. With that cash, Germanus gathered a number of willing provincials, to whom he added a large number of barbarians from the Danubian region, who were attracted by his reputation (and certainly his generous purse) (*Bella* 7.39.9–20; cf. *Ior. Rom.*, 383). Germanus’s death in the summer of 550 delayed the mobilization until command was finally given to Narses in 552 (*Bella* 7.40–8.11, 8.21.4–9). At this point, Narses convinced Justinian to put in even more money, which allowed him to buff up the troops, including adding soldiers (fresh recruits?) coming from Constantinople. Procopius gives an extensive list of the different groups in this force: to the soldiers coming from

Constantinople, Narses added recruits collected in Thrace and Illyria, as well as the previous forces enlisted by Germanus. The barbarians, adds Procopius, were also well-disposed towards Narses, especially the Heruls (*Bella* 8.26.17; see also 7.13.21–22; Whitby 1995, 106), who sent a contingent 3,000 strong. Audoin, the king of the Lombards in Pannonia, sent another 5,500 men, amongst ‘warriors’ and ‘servants’, to whom Narses added a large number of Huns, a few Gepids, as well as a division of Persians commanded by an exiled Persian prince, Kabades (*Proc. Bella* 8.26.10–13). In sum, Narses put together an army based on local volunteers, provincial recruits of all kinds, and barbarians of every sort, lured in by attractive cash rewards, which the commander supplemented with troops drafted elsewhere. It was a rather large army by late Antique standards, totaling, according to Philip Rance, c. 25,000 soldiers (Rance 2005, 447).³⁶

Moving southwards from the northeast, Narses crushed Totila’s army in Teginae, at some point down the Via Flaminia.³⁷ Italy was far from pacified: after Totila, Teia continued the resistance, only to be defeated in 553. In 554, the Franks sent two dukes of the Alamanni, Leutharis and Butilinus, into Italy with a large army, dragging out the conflict for yet another year (Agathias, *Hist.*, 1.5–6). The situation improved for the Byzantines slightly in 555, when Narses was able to subdue Lucca and the Goth Aligern in Cuma (who surrendered and joined the imperial army), and finally put down the Frankish forces, bringing Venetia back to the empire.³⁸ The Goths rebelled one last time in Verona and Brescia by the instigation of another Frankish duke, Ammigus; once again Narses was victorious.³⁹ In 565, Narses was finally in control of Italy. At this point, he probably started to rearrange military districts and reorganize the defense of the borders.⁴⁰ The period of respite was, however, brief: in 566/7 Narses had to scramble the army against another rebellion—this one led by the *magister militum-cum-rex* Sinduald, a Herul (Mar. Av. s.a. 566.4; *Exc. Sang.* s.a. 567; LP *Iohannes III* 63.2). Sindual’s rebellion receives further attention in the next section: for now it is important to notice only that, even if the rebellion was quickly suppressed, it set imperial troops against imperial troops, thus depriving Narses of an important slice of his forces. By 567, the 552 army had proven capable of handling anything Italy could throw at it: Goths, Franks, and rebelling soldiers. Nonetheless, Narses was presumably concerned about keeping up the strength of the army and replenishing its numbers.

The ‘568 army’

There was no Procopius to register this second conscription run in 567–68 or the structure of the ‘568 army’.⁴¹ The ‘chronicle source I’,

however, registers Narses 'inviting' in an army, which it associates with the Lombards. The timing and the context suggest this 'invitation' was connected with an enlistment campaign. A passage in the *HL* indeed points in the same direction. Paul mentions that up to his days some place names preserved the memory of the various 'peoples' under Lombard leadership. '[W]hence', says Paul, 'up to the present day, we call the villages (*vicos*) in which they live Gepids, Bulgars, Sarmates, Pannonians, Suevians, Norici or by other names of this sort' (*HL* 2.26).⁴² Paul saw these groups as different *gentes* under Alboin's command, but a closer look at them reveals a structure not unlike that of the 552 army, namely, a combination of barbarian groups and Byzantine provincial. The recruiting grounds were slightly different: in 552, Narses (and Germanus before him) had recruited Byzantine citizens in Thrace and Illyria, while Paul's list suggests that in 567 he did so in Noricum and Pannonia, which were indeed closer to Italy. To this group Narses added barbarian conscripts, not only Lombards, which he had already used against the Goths (Proc. *Bella* 8.26,12–13), but also a multitude of other *gentes*, as was usual for Byzantine armies: the list differed from 552 (which had Herul, Huns, Gepids, and Persians), but so did the political situation in the Danubian zone.

- 36 Rance's estimate is not far from the general consensus, which oscillates between 20,000 and 30,000 soldiers. See Bury 1923, 2:262; Hannestad 1960, 150–53; Pertusi 1968, 644; Roisl 1981, 34–36; Brown 1984, 84; Haldon 2001, 37.
- 37 For a recount of the battle, see Rance 2005; Roisl 1981. Kaegi has assembled the basic logistical issues of Byzantine Italian campaigns in Kaegi 1995.
- 38 Agathias, 1.18–20; Agn. c. 79. Frankish army: Agathias, 2.1.1–5; Destinies of Leutharis: Agathias, 2.2–3; End of Frankish control of Venetias: Mar. Av. *ad a.* 556.5; but cf. Agn. c. 90, who dates the final expulsion of the Franks to 565; Butilinus: Agathias, 2.4–9; Mar. Av. s.a. 555, 4; Greg. *Hist.* 4.9; Greg. *Dial.* 1.2; LP *Iohannes III*, 63.2. On Narses's campaigns after the formal defeat of the Goths, see Stein 1949, 605–62; Evans 1996, 179–81.
- 39 Menander, fgm. 3.1; Malalas, *Chr.* 18.140; Agn. c. 79 Theop. *Chron.* AM 6055 (237.13–15). The dating is rather problematic, probably 561–63. Cf. *HL* 2.2. Goffart (1957, 76) has suggested 562 for the defeat of Ammigus and the end of the effective Frankish presence in Veneto.
- 40 For Narses's defense of Italy, see Hartmann 1899, 1897a, 348–53. For the reception, see Stein 1949, 612–13, n. 1; Schmidt 1969 [1941], 586–88; Jones 1964a, 292; Christou 1991, 107–08; Christie 2006, 324–331.
- 41 Throughout the text, I have kept '568 army' in quotations to mark its hypothetical character, in opposition to the well-documented 552 army.
- 42 The description is often taken as a picture of the process of ethnogenesis (see, for example, Wenskus 1961; Jarnut 1982, 2003); it seems to me to be an easier explanation to see it as an army, following what is known of the 552 army (or the 535 one), see Proc. *Bella* 7.10.1–3, 12.4, 39.9–16.

What was the role of the Lombards in this force? Were they supplied by the Pannonian kingdom as allied troops (as they did in 552), or were they enlisted as *foederati*—that is, incorporated into a (semi-) regular imperial army, under the command of a local official? The question has a bearing on the later developments of the Lombards into a kingdom: if they were indeed a force under their own leaders, some level of continuity between the Pannonian kingdom and the new polity in Italy is to be expected; conversely, if their basic organization was indeed that of the imperial army, the former political (and social) institutions of the Pannonian kingdom (whatever they might have been) would be of less importance. Traditionally, barbarian troops could serve in the army either as *foederati* or as allied. By the sixth century, the distinction of Byzantine troops vs. *foederati*—that is, troops formed by conscripted citizens and those supplied by foreign *gentes* under their own leaders—had changed, as Procopius explains (*Bella* 3.11.3–5).⁴³ According to him, the army was then made up of three different kinds of troops, namely, regular Byzantine troops, *foederati* troops (φοιδέρατοι), now composed of volunteer-based semi-regular soldiers, and the troops Procopius calls ‘allies’ (σύμμαχοι), that is, troops provided by allied *gentes* as part of a treaty, resembling the fourth- and fifth-century *foederati* (Jones 1964a, 663–4). By the sixth century, then, the distinction between Byzantine troops and (the troops now called) *foederati* was certainly hazy, given that the *foederati* included Byzantine troops, for, in Procopius’s words, ‘there is nothing to prevent anyone from assuming this name’, and that both served under regular commanders (and not local leaders) (*Bella* 3.11.4). A sharper distinction was made between on one side regular troops and *foederati*, which served as regular units, and, on the other, allied troops, which were provided for a specific campaign and commanded by their own leaders.⁴⁴ In the 552 army, the Lombards joined in as allies provided by Audoin (*Bella* 8.26.12) and were dismissed after Teginae (552)—according to Procopius on account of their indiscipline (*Bella* 8.33.2–3). The evidence for the Lombards’ enrolment in 568 is much less certain: nonetheless, if Paul’s list of peoples within Alboin’s army can be trusted, it was an army composed not only of Lombards, but also other barbarian groups and even provincial Romans, which would point to *foederati* (in the sixth-century sense), and not allies. Moreover, as the next chapter argues, it is possible that Alboin was no longer in command of the Pannonian kingdom when he moved to Italy. In addition to that, the ‘consular source’ attests to a movement on a permanent basis (hence the Lombards bringing their families), which would not fit with a one-campaign agreement, but would not be too distant from the usual life of a regular soldier quartered in military camps (Jones 1964a, 630).

- 43 See Jones 1964a, 663–65; Chrysos 1989, 17; Elton 1996, 91–96; Pohl 1997a, 78–87; Parnell 2017, 16–17.
- 44 See, for example, Agathias description of Narses making Sinduald king of the Herules; Agath. *Hist.* 1.20.8. On Agathias, Cameron 1970; Kaldellis 2003; Croke 2003, 415–21. For the new role of the *foederati*, see Jones 1964a, 664–66; Whitby 1995, 72; Petersen 2013, 50.

Combining the idea of invitation from the ‘chronicle source I’ and Paul’s list of ‘nations’ under Alboin suggests the troops behind the 568 ‘Lombards’ might not have been too different from the 552 Byzantine army. They were put together in a similar area and comprised an analogous group of recruits—a mix of provincials and barbarians. A conscription run in 567–68 would make sense given the wear and tear of the 552 army, especially after Sinduald rebelled, taking down with him part of the army. Although Lombards were probably numerous among the soldiers, the ‘568 army’ was not a Lombard army; moreover, in all likelihood, the Lombards serving in it were not ‘allies’ but recruits. This new army, however, was not under Byzantine control for long: if the ‘consular source’ is to be trusted, by 569 they were setting northern Italy on fire. This sudden change of heart, however, was nothing new to soldiers in Italy. In the imperial army, ‘rebellion’ was the word of the day.

The anatomy of military rebellions

In the sixth century, military rebellions were a constant, and they provide the context for the events of 568–69. The period was especially bad for soldiers. Agathias is probably correct to blame Justinian (Agath. *Hist.* 5.14.1–2). His suggestion that the emperor had neglected the army in his final years, however, only partially explains the problem, which can be traced to the logistics of expeditionary campaigns. Agathias was nonetheless right to identify the endless arrears as the main cause of strife, to which he added corruption (*Hist.* 5.14.3–4). Those were the conditions of service the ‘568 army’ found in Italy, arguably quite different from the deal they had been offered. To further add fuel to the fire, the ‘568’ fresh recruits were likely quartered with the remaining units of the 552 army, including several divisions that had recently rebelled under Sinduald. Oppressed by an overstretched administration and contaminated by insubordinate colleagues, it was only a matter of time before the newcomers rebelled.

Join the army, they said

Military unrest in the sixth century was rooted in changes in the interplay between public and private money behind the logistics of the army.⁴⁵ The military was the single largest expense of the empire and consumed a significant part of the budget. Since the late Republic, the army was a tax-supported force based on wages, even if the exact mechanisms of paying and equipping soldiers varied in time depending on shifting social and economic factors. Then, soldiers' wages were raised from taxes and augmented by booty. Their income was buffed up by regular donations and, especially, by a gift of land upon retirement (Rathbone 2007). Soldiers were mostly drafted from the population and, by the late third century, from the families of veterans mandated to hereditary service (Jones 1964a, 614–15). This combination of hereditary military service and grants of lands to veterans resulted in the creation of a group of landholding military families, which formed the basic social group behind the rank and file.⁴⁶ From the fifth century on, however, the state found it more and more complicated to circumvent local resistance to conscription. Local elites, especially, were always concerned about the scarcity of laborers and, as local magnates became more and more influential, they made sure that the local labor force remained untouched by the army recruiter (Jones 1964a, 615–17). Military services remained nonetheless mandatory to military families, who tended to see it as an honor (Stewart 2016). In the early sixth century, Anastasius I (491–518) increased the benefits for soldiers on the field armies, making service more attractive to local populations (Treadgold 1995, 203), even if the resistance of landowners to lose their laborer probably remained strong (Teall 1965, 315; Fotiou 1988). In theory, people were free to volunteer. Officially, the law barred from the army only certain categories, like slaves, *coloni adscripticii*, *curiales* and *cohortales* (*Cod. Ius.* XII.xxxiv.2, 3, 4). In practice, however, in the sixth century, military service became the privilege of a hereditary group. This trend is clear in an early sixth-century letter from the duke of the Thebaid (Egypt), which recommends a certain Heracleon to serve under the tribune at Hermopolis, as long as the recruit 'came from military stock' (*ex genere oritur militari*).⁴⁷ Conscripts, thereby, were sought within families that held military service as a tradition and an honor.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ On military rebellions, see Jones 1964a, 648–48, 678; Kaegi 1981; Haldon 1986; Southern and Dixon 1996, 170–74; Lee 2005, 122–23; 2007, 72; Rance 2007, 374; Parnell 2017, 166–69.

⁴⁶ Jones 1964a, 669, see also MacMullen 1967. Carrié rightly suggests that one should look to the prosperity of the army, as well as to the laws constraining the sons of veterans to enlist, for the origins of this relatively well defined military 'caste', see Carrié 1995, 45, see also Whitby 1995, 65–66.

- 47 *P. Ryl.* 609, in Hunt, de Monins Johnson, and Roberts 1911. See Jones 1964a, 669.
- 48 Whether the modes of recruitment set by the time of Diocletian continued into the sixth century is a matter of much debate. The fact that the *Justinian Code* has not incorporated the laws on conscription preserved in the *Theodosian Code* has led many scholars to believe that conscription was abandoned for voluntary enlistment. See Müller 1912, 127; Stein 1919, 122; Grosse 1920, 301; Jones 1964a, 668; Pertusi 1968, 663; Haldon 1979, 17–28; Treadgold 1995, 149–54, 203. More recently, however, Michael Whitby has convincingly argued for the continuation of conscription, arguing that the purging of conscription laws in the *Justinian Code* removed only extraordinary laws: the basic rules of conscription, a daily reality since Diocletian, were absent from both codes, since their mechanisms were taken for granted; see Whitby 1995, 75–87, followed by Parnell 2017, 24–28.

At the same time, the burden of supporting the army shifted slowly but inexorably towards the military families. The *Justinian Code* did not preserve the laws that established grants of land for veterans, supporting the idea that most soldiers, or at least their families, were already settled as landowners (Jones 1964a, 676). From the fifth century on, the degree to which landholding was necessary to support the soldiers increased, while the capacity of the state to support a standing army dropped significantly. For the army garrisoned at the borders (*limitanei*), the evidence—mostly preserved from Egypt—suggests that most recruits served locally. Close to home, soldiers could pursue other occupations to supplement their wages—one soldier in Egypt, for example, moonlighted as a boatman (*P. Monac.* I [574]). On top of that, nearby family property offered a safe support in times of need (and arrears).

Chris Wickham rightly argued that the shift from armies based on redistribution of taxes to armies based on direct distribution of land was an essential part of the transition from Roman to post-Roman states (Wickham 2005, 84, 120–21; Halsall 2003, 47, 53; Petersen 2013, 55). In the West, the post-Roman kingdoms ascribed shares of the public revenues directly to the army, simplifying the tax system and guaranteeing the military a safer access to the available resources. The result was the coupling of landholding and military service, which turned the imperial tradition of rewarding veterans with land on its head: henceforth, military service was the consequence, not the cause, of tenure of land. Soldiers, and especially mercenary groups, could still be rewarded with land, but henceforth military service was seen as a prerogative of an already landowning elite. In the East, however, the resilience of the Roman state prevented this adaptation.⁴⁹ By the sixth century, the empire still maintained a standing army, in which troops remained largely paid with gold (or equivalents in kind). However, the state could hardly raise enough money to pay all salaries, and the result was frequent delays and arrears.⁵⁰ To support

themselves during such times, as mentioned above, soldiers relied on their family properties and on side jobs, sometimes as hired swords (Iust. Nov. 116). In order not to hinder that flexibility, regulations on military leave became more elastic, while Justinian added dispositions to prevent corrupt officers from imposing illegal charges.⁴⁹ These ad hoc arrangements notwithstanding, the conditions of the soldiers were probably worse in the imperial service than in the Western armies, as a comparison of rebellions and mutinies shows.

The situation of expeditionary forces, such as the 552 and the '568' Italian armies, was even worse. Drawn from provincial and barbarian backgrounds, the soldiers Justinian gathered to fight in Italy, Africa, and Asia, had no direct access to their family possessions or to any kind of supporting community. In cases of arrears, expeditionary soldiers had no safety net and were exposed to debt or starvation. During the sixth century, the fragile situation of these soldiers, combined with the structural limitations to maintain a regular flow of cash towards the army, resulted in rebellions all over the empire.

Arrears

The endemic arrears and the resulting break in discipline are well attested in the sources. For example, in 541, after the defeat of the Goths, Belisarius called attention to the constant delays and the unpreparedness of the armies in Italy. Concerned, he wrote to Justinian highlighting the impact on morale, and suggesting 'that the majority of those serving in your armies have deserted to the enemy', or so Procopius claims (*Bella* 7.12.7–8).⁵⁰ The situation was so dire that the general could not count on his troops to actually fight. Such situation was repeated throughout the period: in 579, the *magister militum per Armeniam* faced the same standoff, while his troops would not fight unless their salaries were paid (Joh. Eph. 6.28). Fifteen years after that, Gregory the Great voiced similar concerns: 'The *Theodosiaci* indeed, who remained here without payment, are barely guarding the walls, and if the city, abandoned by everyone, does not have peace, how will it survive?' (Greg. *Reg.* 2.38, [July 592]).

49 For the resilience of the Roman state in the East, see Wickham 2005, 124–44; Gascou 2008, and, with especial emphasis on the role of large properties, Sarris 2006.

50 Problems of payment: Kaegi 1981, 90–91, 94–95; Parnell 2017, 169–71. While the slowdown of the economy seems to be a given, the underlying causes are not. Wickham (2005) defends a structural shift, aggravated by the crisis in the fifth century; cf. Sarris 2006, who suggests that the drop in income is more a result of the growing private power of landowners, who were in a better

position to evade taxes, than macroeconomic patterns (the idea is not particularly new, see Stein 1949 and also Brandes 2002). The strains to maintain the army generated competition, and henceforth extra tension, between the army and the population, contribute to unrest; see Kaegi 1981, 43 for dissent in urban and rural milieu, see now Bell 2013, esp. 51–210. For the context of expeditionary forces, see Jones 1964a, 678.

51 On leaves: *Cod. Iust.* I.xxvii.2.9. See Jones 1964a, 674.

52 On Procopius's letters and speeches, see Taragna 2000, 65–139.

Arrears were also behind Totila's fantastic recovery in the 540s, a risk of which Belisarius (or Procopius) was well aware (*Bella* 7.12.7–8). Frustrated with the lack of payment, some soldiers simply deserted: as Totila advanced into the south, a unit of Illyrian soldiers, tired of waiting for their dues, just abandoned their commander, Vitalian, and headed back home. According to Procopius, they sent for the emperor, begging for pardon and stating that 'they had come to their homes in this manner for no other reason than that, after their long service in Italy, *without receiving the regular pay at all*, the state now owed them a large sum of money' (*Bella* 7.11.13–16, emphasis added). It would be relatively easy for the Illyrians to just pack and go back home. For a group of Isaurians defending Rome from Totila in 549, however, that option was certainly not available. Nursing a grievance against the emperor, 'because *for many years nothing had been paid* them by the emperor (...) [they] very secretly opened negotiations with Totila and agreed to hand over the city' (*Bella* 7.36.7, emphasis added). Disgruntled soldiers shifted sides, not only on account of Totila's exemplary treatment of prisoners, but especially on account of the terrible treatment the soldiers suffered in the years following the victory over Vitiges.⁵³

This moral flexibility was not limited to the troops quartered in Italy. During Justinian campaigns in Asia (527–32), the garrison of Aleppo, in Syria, tired of waiting for their payment, shifted sides to the Persians (*Bella* 2.7.37). The lack of pay was also one of the main causes of the rebellion of the troops in Africa after Justinian's conquest (536–46) (*Bella* 4. 14–15, 18.9). The soldiers in Carthage, dissatisfied with the rewards they received and with the accumulation of arrears, rebelled against the local command, electing Stotzas, a bodyguard serving under the *magister militum* Martinus (*Bella* 3.11.30, 4.15.1, cf. *Iord. Rom.* 369). Stotzas moved the rebelling soldiers out of Carthage and resisted the loyalist troops for almost a decade. Due to the continuous arrears, imperial troops kept flocking to him, and Procopius claims that, at a certain point, some two thirds of the forces in Africa had joined him (*Proc. Bella* 4.15, 4.16.3). Procopius, who was there during the rebellion, paints a clear picture of the complaints of the soldiers in a speech attributed to Stotzas (but most likely fabricated by Procopius). Stotzas, when facing the imperial troops sent

to put down the rebellion, came alone towards the opposing troops and said:

53 Rebel soldiers on Totila's army: Proc. *Bella*, 7.18.26–28; treatment of prisoners: *Bella*, 7.5.11, 7.36.25–27; condition of soldiers: *Bella*, 7.1.23, 7.9.1–5.

Fellow-soldiers, you are not acting justly in taking the field against kinsmen and those who have been reared with you, and in raising arms against men who in vexation at your misfortunes and the wrongs you have suffered have decided to make war upon the emperor of the Romans. Or do you not remember that you have been *deprived of the pay* which has been owing you for a long time back, and that you have been *robbed of the enemy's spoils*, which the law of war has set as prizes for the dangers of battle?

(*Bella* 4.15.54–57, emphasis added)

Independent of how close Procopius's eloquence was to Stotzas's actual words, the rebel leader was able to turn the loyalist troops to his side. The commanders, noticing the change of heart of their troops, fled back to the headquarters, where Stotzas eventually had them killed (*Bella* 4.15.58–59). Until his death in 545, Stotzas frequently received reinforcements from soldiers dissatisfied with the endless arrears. The rebel's death changed little the mutinous spirit in Africa: in that same year, soldiers again mutinied in Carthage, following the promises of another rebel, Gontharis, to pay their salaries, which continued being delayed (*Bella* 4.26).

What most soldiers asked for was simply their regular wage. They had no especial political claims or religious demands, nor were they advancing candidates to the imperial throne, as armies had often done in the past. It is not surprising, thus, that the single most effective measure to counter mutinies was to pay the soldiers. That was the tactic used first by Belisarius (*Bella* 4.15.9–16), and later by Germanus to fight off Stotzas's rebellion (*Bella* 4.16.4–7). When Narses moved into Italy to subdue Totila (552), he requested from Justinian not only troops, but also money to pay the arrears of the Italian troops (*Bella*, 8.26.5–6). Every successful mission against rebels in the period was based on setting right their payment.

The quest for land

Some of the soldiers, however, might have been interested in more than their usual paycheck. Back home, many soldiers came from traditional landowning military families, whose properties were an

important part of their income. It is not surprising that, once settled overseas, they tried to acquire property. In Italy, at least, many soldiers of the expeditionary armies became landowners in the traditional way, by investing their wages into land (e.g., *P. Ital.* 22, *P. Dip.* 122; Jones 1964a, 678). A few acres guaranteed support for the rainy days and were in fact (though still not officially recognized) part of the soldier's expected income (Haldon 1993). Without access to their family property back home, it is safe to assume that many soldiers would think it was in their right to get access to grants of land, as it had always been a resource for enduring the constant arrears. The demand for land was thus a consequence of the ever-present arrears.

For instance, Procopius mentions that the soldiers in Africa who joined Stotzas's rebellion in 536 had their eyes on the lands that were formerly held by the Vandals, whose wives and daughters they had married, but whose land had been incorporated into the state (δημόσιος) (*Bella* 4.14.8–10). It has been suggested that Procopius is referring to the *sortes Vandalorum*, an allotment made out of public funds to support the barbarian troops.⁵⁴ As mentioned above, the Western governments had solved the growing gap between military expenses and revenue by connecting soldiers directly with their supply units, either in the form of tax collection or landownership (see pp. 58–59). For the soldiers coming to Africa, the system would guarantee their support throughout the long delays in payment. And after leaving home and hearth behind and risking their necks for the emperor, were those lands not the rewards they deserved for victory? (cf. *Bella* 4.15.54–57). Even though some soldiers might have married the widows and daughters of the defeated Vandals as a way to strengthen their claim, as Procopius suggests, the main issue was the belief that the military land in Africa should go to the soldiers as part of their rewards for defeating the Vandals (*Bella* 4.14.8–11). Likewise, after the defeat of the Goths in 540, the imperial troops in Italy were dissatisfied to the point of rebellion. According to Procopius, what drove the soldiers to mutiny was not only the arrears—to which Procopius alludes in Belisarius's letter to Justinian quoted above—but also by the stinginess (μικρολογία) of their rewards (*Bella* 7.1.33). The similarities with the episode in Africa are evident: were the soldiers in Italy also expecting to receive land?

The problem of leadership

One of the most remarkable characteristics of sixth-century military rebellions was the reluctance of commissioned officers to get involved (Kaegi 1981, 61–62). This absence is highly unusual. The fourth

century had its share of great leaders, popular with the troops, raising their armies to grapple with the empire, some of them quite successfully—one must think of Constantine I or Julian after him.⁵⁵ The trend continued in the fifth century, even if then most successful generals, such as Aetius and Ricimer, opted to remain behind the throne (O'Flynn 1983). Likewise, starting with Heraclius in 610, rebellions were once again headed by *strategoi*, by generals (Kaegi 1981, 61–62). In the sixth century, however, the leaders elected by the soldiers were mostly lower officers, if not simple soldiers. The sources often preserved the background of these men, illuminating the social milieu of the mutineers. Stotzas, who was elected by the troops in Africa as their leader ('τυράννος', says Procopius) in 536 (*Bella* 4.15.1; cf. Marc. Com. s.a. 537, *Iord. Rom.* 369; Coripp. *Ioh.* 3.305–13), is a good example. Before the rebellion, Stotzas was a bodyguard of the *magister militum* Martinus (Μαρτίνου δορυφόροις) (*Proc. Bella* 3.11.30, 4.15.1) or, as Jordanes puts it, 'almost the last of soldiers, a little client of the *magister militum* Martinus' (*Iord. Rom.* 369). Shortly after Stotzas's rebellion, another mutiny in Africa raised as commander Gontharis, also a former bodyguard (δορυφόρος) (*Proc. Bella* 4.19.5–6, 4.25.4–11). The army in Asia did not behave differently. When the garrison in Dara rebelled against the empire (537), they established a 'tyranny', electing one of the soldiers, John, as their leader (*Bella* 1.26.5–12). By the end of the century, when the army fighting in Persia rebelled against the imperial authorities—this time against Maurice's reductions in salary—the soldiers managed to secure the support of a duke, whom they elected their leader. This episode, which happened during the *Monokarton* mutiny (588–89), shows the reluctance of commanding officers to line up with their men against the empire (Kaegi 1981, 101–19). According to Theophylact Simocatta:

54 For the evidence, see *Proc. Bella* 3.5.11–15; cf. *Vict. Vit. HP* 1.12–13, 2.39, 3.4. On the *sortes*, see Goffart 1980, 53–54, 81, 112, and more recently, Goffart 2010, 92, see also Modéran 2002; Merrills and Miles 2010, 66–70.

55 For the context, see Wardman 1984, and the articles in Barnes, Paschoud, and Szidat 1997.

the soldiers assembled and sanctioned the election of a general. It was for this reason that they summoned Germanus (*dux Phoenitiae*), introduced him into the council, and decided to entrust to him the reins of generalship. But when he rejected the camp's demand, they insisted that he comply with the election, and added threats that the punishment for disobedience would even be death; the soldiers' resolution prevailed, and Germanus was proclaimed general

The most famous leader of lowly origins is Phocas, who became emperor after the Balkan army rebelled en masse against Maurice in 602. Phocas, before taking the purple (602–10), was a lower soldier in the army in the Balkan. The sources refer to him as a centurion (ἐκατόνταρχος) (Theo. Sim. 8.7.7), or as a soldier (στρατεύτης) (*Chron. Pasch.* s.a. 602; Joh. Ant. *frag.* 218d; Theoph. s.a. 6092; cf. *HL* 4.26).

It is not hard to grasp why top commanders did not step up as rebel leaders, independently of how many emperors had sprung as military usurpers in the past. They were certainly much better off than regular soldiers, and arrears did not harm them as much. The *annona* of a soldier, after Justinian incorporatated the quinquennial donative into the salary, amounted to five *solidi* a year (Jones 1964a, 670). A duke—as far as can be extrapolated from the evidence—earned up to 1,400.5 *solidi*, counting his salary in cash plus perquisites in kind; a sum that, given his position, he was more likley to see than the soldiers under him.⁵⁶ *Magistri militum* likely earned much more. In addition to that, there was a myriad of illegal profits higher officials routinely capitalized on.⁵⁷ Besides their more comfortable position, officers were very aware of the outcome of rebellions: usurpers never won. And when the empire mustered the strength to strike back, soldiers would be sent back to their proper quarters—some might be punished, some might be sent to less desirable frontiers—while generals would be executed. Successful coups needed inside support in Constantinople. Procopius summarized the state of affairs in a short dialogue between Euphemia, the daughter of John the Cappadocian, the pretorian prefect *per Orientem*, and Antonia, Belisarius's wife. When Euphemia questioned Antonia why Belisarius would not depose Justinian:

Antonia replied quickly (trying to incriminate John): 'It is because we are not able, my daughter, to undertake revolutions in camp, unless some of those here at home join with us in the task.'

(*Bella* 1.25.12–17)

Revolution in the camp was courting death without strong support from within Constantinople. After Theodosius I (379–95), emperors no longer took the field with the army; instead, they remained safely inside the capital, invulnerable not only to foreign aggression but also to rebel armies. For, if one army rebelled, from the safe position in the capital the emperor could draw on the resources of the rest of the empire to counter the threat. One by one, all the usurpers were cut down by the central authorities (Kaegi 1981, 20–25). The power of

the army to influence politics was thus drastically reduced—especially if compared to the emperor-making soldiers of the third century. The destinies of the empire were set from Constantinople and only the court or popular pressure from the streets had actual influence in the process (Beck 1975, 373–78). The result was a lack of trust amongst the higher officers in the possibilities of a successful rebellion (Beck 1975; Kaegi 1981, 42).

Rebel soldiers and barbarian kings

Once an army rebelled, the clock started ticking for the empire to muster its incommensurably larger resources and quash the revolt. Without a leadership, a clear objective, or local support, mutinies did not take the soldiers far. Kaegi rightly puts it, '[i]t was not always difficult to begin a mutiny, but it was not easy to organize a government and maintain it' (Kaegi 1981, 61). Since mutinies lacked political support at higher levels (and usurpers were renowned for their short life expectancy), a possible solution was to give the movement a more acceptable political coloring. Drifting away from open rebellion and associating oneself with some local political banner was an alternative to direct opposition against the powers that be (i.e., rebellion and the threat of usurpation) that could clear the path to conciliation (i.e., usurpers had to be killed, barbarian kings could be assimilated); more than that, it could attract a certain level of (vital) local support. In effect, rebelling soldiers could associate either with local political groups or with barbarian elements represented within the army. In previous centuries, while emperors would never negotiate with usurpers, hostile barbarian kings had been incorporated as *foederati* (in the fifth-century sense) and developed peaceful relations with the empire. The establishment of the Frankish and Gothic kingdoms in the fifth and sixth centuries are the most obvious examples. The option to flock behind the banner of a barbarian nation (either by a commander becoming a barbarian king or rebel soldiers shifting allegiance to one), was not a matter of self-representation or cultural assimilation (or dissimulation). It was instead a political maneuver to escape the usually funebrial consequences of the traditional antagonism between legitimate and illegitimate imperial contestants.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ The data is for a duke in Lybia Inferior: Iust. *Ed.* XIII.18; cf. *Ed.* XIII.3, see Jones 1964a, 677.

⁵⁷ On officers misappropriating army funds, see Jones 1964a, 646; Southern and Dixon 1996, 82. The essential work for corruption in the Roman Empire is still MacMullen 1988, 171–77, which should now be read together with Brown

58 The debate on ethnicity and identity has produced a vast number of publications, some of them more informative than others. The question of identity has been closely related to the concept of ‘ethnogenesis’, and has been operational in most of the debates on the topic. The fundamental theoretical text is Geary’s attempt to appropriate the concept of ‘situational identity’ to support readings on ethnogenesis; see Geary 1983. A closer read of the anthropological foundations of the concept, however, highlights a few problems, see esp. Barth 1969; Okamura 1981; Mitchell 1974. Situational or multiple identity became a fundamental concept for early Medieval scholarship, esp. for works produced around the *Transformations of the Roman World* series (e.g., Pohl and Reimitz 1998; Goetz, Jarnut, and Pohl 2003, but see also Amory 1997). The relationship between the ethnic composition of the armies—usually heavy on soldiers with a ‘barbaric’ background, ‘Franks’, ‘Goths’, ‘Lombards’, among others—and the political use of ethnic denominations—‘the Franks’, ‘the Goths’, ‘the Lombards’ as a political unit—was complex and the limits of our prosopographic evidence prevents a deeper analysis. It must be noted, however, that although ethnic political units were not formed exclusively of their ethnic namesakes, it does not mean that, once part of a political unit, people would (or even could) freely accept new ethnic identities. For the problems with the uncritical reception of identity, see the studies collected in Gillett, and also Gillett 2006.

The search for alternative political allegiances to the empire is clear in many sixth-century rebellions. Once again, Stotzas’s rebellion (536–46) provides a good example. From the start, Stotzas tried to capitalize on the Vandals as a source of legitimacy. It is not unlikely that some of the Vandals actually joined Stotzas’s ranks: even though Procopius claims Justinian sent the entire Vandal army to fight on the eastern front, he also suggests that a group had escaped. Those Vandals made their way back to Africa and eventually joined Stotzas and his rebelling soldiers (*Bella* 4.14.16–21). It is also possible, however, that Stotzas simply used the Vandals as a political banner of opposition to the empire: his group of dissatisfied soldiers had a better chance of success associating itself with whatever was left of the previous government than as deserters. After a major defeat at the hands of Germanus, Stotzas fled with his ‘Vandals’ to the countryside. There, he soon found a new political allegiance, joining the *Mauri* and marrying the daughter of one of their rulers. Victor of Tunnuna suggests that in 541 ‘Stotzas received the kingship with tyranny in the desert’ and unified the peoples of Africa (Vic. Ton. s.a. 541.2, 543). Up to his death, Stotzas used *Mauri* troops against the empire.⁵⁹ It is clear that Stotzas relied on both Vandals and *Mauri* as political banners around which he could articulate his resistance against the empire: there is no need for a deeper social reengineering behind his choices (nor a cunning change of identity), but instead a maneuver to establish an alternative (and more viable) political affiliation. By associating his followers first with the Vandals and later with the

Mauri, Stotzas was able to maintain his opposition against the empire for a decade.

Military rebellions in Italy before 568

In Italy, shifting allegiances between Byzantines and Goths was also a common element in military rebellions. In the rebellion against the empire in 541, even if Totila used his Gothic background to marshal the resistance in transpadane Italy, he actually represented a larger chunk of the Italian society. Resentful members of the old Gothic regime, such as Ildibadus and Totila, were prominent, but rebel Byzantine soldiers and dissatisfied civilians added volume to the rebellion. According to Procopius:

When Ildibadus learned that Belisarius had departed from Ravenna and was on his way [to Constantinople], he began to gather about him all the barbarians and as many of the Roman soldiers as *were inclined to favor a revolution* [νεώτερα πράγματα, lit. ‘new deeds’]. And he sought by every means to strengthen his rule, and labored diligently to recover for the Gothic nation the sovereignty of Italy. Now at first not more than a thousand men followed him and they held one city, Pavia, but little by little *all the inhabitants of Liguria and Venetia came over to his side*

(*Bella* 7.1.25–27, emphasis added)

The rebellion started in Pavia—eventually to become the center of Lombard power—and was supported not only by ‘all the barbarians’, but also by imperial soldiers and the rest of the transpadane provinces. After the death of Ildibadus, the command fell shortly to a Herul, Eraric, before it passed on to Totila (*Bella* 7.1.37–7.2). Thus, the ‘Gothic’ army under Totila was a combination of barbarians of different origins, dissatisfied Italians, and rebel soldiers. Their allegiance had nothing to do with their ‘real’ or ‘perceived’ identity (to which modern historians could hardly attest), but to an alternative political affiliation in which to play their opposition to the empire. Joining the Goths was clearly a political—in contrast with an ethnic—position, and even Procopius, imbued with Justinian’s propaganda of ‘Romans’ fighting back ‘barbarians’, could not mask it (Amory 1997, 149–94).

59 Vic. Ton. s.a. 543; Proc. *Bella* 4.11.5, 23.1, 23.27, 24.6, Coripp. *Ioh.* III 458; Marc. Com. *Addit.* s.a. 543; he used his *Mauri* connections to oppose the Romans until his death in the battlefield; see Proc. *Bella* 4.26.10–14; Coripp. *Ioh.* IV 161ff.; Marc. com *Addit.* ad a. 545; Vic. Tur. s.a. 545; Iord. *Rom.* 384.

Fifteen years after Narses had crushed Totila's army, another rebellion sprang up in northern Italy. In 566/67, soldiers in the northern army rebelled, raising their *magister militum*, the Herul Sinduald, as king. Sinduald commanded the Herul federates within the army, and had faithfully fought under Narses, who made him commander over the Heruls (Agath. *Hist.* 1.20.8, 2.7.6, 2.8.6, 2.9/7–8, 13).⁶⁰ When Narses was reorganizing the military defenses in the north, Sinduald was made *magister militum* and placed in one of the new duchies, possibly quartered around Trent.⁶¹ It was probably this army division that rebelled in 566/67 and raised Sinduald as their leader. The participation of the *magister militum* is unusual, given his high rank, and his claim to power is not at all clear. The three near-contemporary sources present him in different forms: for the *LP*, the *Eruli* raised a rebellion (*intarsia*) and made Sinduald their king (*LP Vita Iohannes III* 63.2), for Marius of Avenches, the Herul Sinduald 'became a tyrant' (*tyrannidem adsumpsit*) (Mar. Av. s.a. 566.4), while the *Excepta Sangallensis* simply mentions 'king Sindual' (*rex Sindual*) (*Exc. Sang.* 710). The uncertainty around the title Sinduald claimed might have less to do with the nature of the source than with the uncertain political aspect of rebellions. It is not unlikely that Sinduald called upon his Herul background to support his claim among the numerous Herulian troops fighting in Italy (Sarantis 2010, 381–93, cf. Steinacher 2010, 349–56). In addition to the Heruls, however, the *magister militum* Sinduald commanded a regular Byzantine army, composed of soldiers of diverse backgrounds (either citizens or barbarians), who probably rebelled with him—or else they would presumably have killed him on the spot. These soldiers supported his rebellion and made him king: the rebellion, nonetheless, did not make any of them Heruls (besides those who were born so), but instead it was intended to create a political alternative to the empire, which would, presumably, be a 'Herul Kingdom' composed of soldiers of multiple origins. As was the case with Stotzas and Totila, the Heruls became a political banner behind which dissatisfied soldiers could flock. At any rate, Narses was present to put Sinduald down before he could gather any more support (Mar. Av. s.a. 566.4; *Exc. Sang.* 710; Evagr. 4.24, *LP Vita Iohannes III* 63.2). Had Sinduald succeeded, however, this book might well be talking about Herul, instead of Lombard, Italy.

⁶⁰ Bibliography on the Heruls is quite limited; see Ellengård 1987; Sarantis 2010. For an analysis of the ancient origins of the Herules (sometimes ignoring the limitations of the sources), see Steinacher 2010.

⁶¹ *Magister militum: Reg. Pont. Rom.* 990, 1031. The title Sinduald received from Narses might have already been that of *magister militum*: Agathias refers to στρατηγός, which could mean different positions in the army. The association of Sinduald with Trent, and more specifically with the Brenner Pass is in *HL* 2.3

in which Paul calls Sinduald *rex Brentorum*, ‘qui adhuc de Herulorum stirpe remanserat, quos secum in Italiam veniens olim Odoacar adduxerat’ (Cf. Paul the Deacon, *Hist. Rom.* 15.8–9). The *Brenti* would be a misreading of the Alpine people *Breones* or *Briones*. See Waitz comments on his edition of the *Historia Langobardorum* (MGH SRL p. 73, fn. 4), see also Stein 1949, 613, n. 1; Schmidt 1969 [1941], 558; 1934, 458–59. Though the explanation stretches the sources, the location of the *mag. mil.* there is not overall unlikely.

The Lombard rebellion

Even though the sources are tacit about the events that led to the advent of the Lombards in 569, the surviving evidence from the sixth-century army provides a reliable picture for Italy in the late 560s. The bad conditions of the army, which had fueled Totila’s rebellion, remained after Narses’s victories in the 550s. Even though he brought money and new recruits (Proc. *Bella* 8.26.5–25), it was not long before wages started to lag behind again: in 553, payment was already delayed (Agath. *Hist.* 1.18.1). Even so, Narses was able to handle the troops and defeat the last resistance in Italy, as well as a Frankish invasion commanded by the Alamanni Leutharis and Butilinus (*Hist.* 1.16, 2.1–3). This chain of victories, however, did not improve the situation of the army. In 566/7, soldiers rebelled and flocked behind the Heruls, electing Sinduald king. Once again the 552 army was victorious. Narses then recruited again on the Balkans and in the Danubian zone to replenish the army. This new force was attached as an army of *foederati* and introduced into Italy, and likely quartered (not without some confusion) in the Po Valley.

The details of what happened next are lost. The ‘consular source’ registered the chaos that followed: but followed what? At some point after 568, Justin II (565–78) removed the victorious (but likely very old) Narses from his position. Justin seems to be following the model set almost three decades before by Justinian, who had dismantled the overall military command to ensure the reestablishment of civil government and the collection of taxes, while at the same time removing the threat of a military coup (Proc. *Bella* 7.1.29–33); for Justinian this commander had been Belisarius (*Bella*, 6.30.1–3, p. 38). for Justin II, it was Narses. Justin II was thus presumably extending Justinian’s *Pragmatica Sanctio* (554), which was intended to regulate the demilitarization of Italy after the defeat of Totila.⁶² By removing Narses and reinstating the position of praetorian prefect, to which the emperor indicated a certain Longinus, Justin II most likely expected to restore civilian authority and defuse the risk of a military tyranny. Unsurprisingly, the results of Justin’s repetition of Justinian’s policy were the same as previously: the civilian population grew weary of the taxes, which people, at least in Rome, considered a form of

‘servitude’ (*servitium*) (*LP*, *Vita Iohannis III*, 63.1). At the same time, the command of the army was divided to local dukes, depriving the forces of a centralized command, in an attempt to normalize military activities in the peninsula. As Justinian in 540, Justin II miscalculated the stability of Italy. By dismissing Narses, however, Justin II deprived Italy of a coordinated military command, while at the same time damaging the morale and discipline of the troops with the political meddling in the military affairs (Kaegi 1981, 35). As long as the Italian army was under a single military command, the threat of combined response by the military forces in the area was a powerful tool to keep dissident armies in line: rebelling forces, like Sindual’s, could be easily put down if they had to bear the weight of the combined forces in Italy. Without a capable military command, a rebelling army could easily set the example for other armies, resulting in a general conflagration.

It is possible that Narses was removed from command while the new army was on the move into Italy (which, given that the new troops were not rushed towards a specific campaign, might have taken several months), and that they were relocated in Italy before Longinus could take hold of the situation. In any case, even in normal circumstances, the logistics of the Italian army were far from effective, and very soon the new soldiers found out the real conditions of service. The chaos reported by the ‘consular source’ registers the ensuing conflicts: soon after their arrival in Italy, the soldiers started living off the land—presumably, under much worse conditions than agreed upon recruitment. The ‘consular source’ emphasis on the Lombards bringing their families speaks of local concerns over the strain on local resources: families, although a common presence in imperial armies, were extra mouths and thus a further threat to survival (Greg. *Hist.* 4.41; Mar. Av. s.a. 569; *HL* 2.7). Soon, the removal of Narses, combined with the dissatisfaction of the Italians with imperial rule and the pervasive arrears (Agath. *Hist.* 1.16, 2.1–3.) took the situation to a point of rebellion, as had often been the case in recent years. The deposition of Narses created a vacuum of military command upon which the mutinous troops in the north quickly seized. As with Sindual’s rebellion in 566, the soldiers shifted allegiances to a barbarian group, this time the Lombards. In contrast to 566/7, however, the rebels were left unchecked: no unified command in Italy remained that could muster the loyal troops against the rebellion. As with Idalbadus and Totila before them, after this initial success, the rebelling soldiers soon found the support of most of transpadane Italy. By the 570s, the rebels had succeeded in creating a political alternative to the imperial government in Italy: they were now the ‘Lombards’.

Understanding the advent of the Lombards as a rebellion—though not specifically so portrayed in the sources—solves the issue of the incapacity of the not inconsiderable Roman army in the north to challenge an ‘invasion’, especially in Venetia (see pp. 52–54). Even though it is impossible to reconstruct the size of the 552 army, it was an experienced force and it had been proved efficient many times, as recently as in 566/67. If the Lombards had forced their way into Italy, even if the imperial troops proved themselves unable to resist them, they would certainly have engaged the invaders in battle. If so, the contemporary sources would have some record of that (Mor 1980, 254; Christie 1991, 99). However, there is none: the only mention of resistance is the probably legendary siege of Pavia, preserved much later in the *HL* (*HL* 2.26–27; but see pp. 49–55). In addition to that, it is likely that at least two of the four *magistri militum* established by Narses in the north—both in the western Po Valley, in Susa and around the lake Como—were still in place at least until the mid-570s.⁶³ This army did not simply disappear—or hide behind the walls afraid of the invaders, as has been suggested (e.g., Christie 1991, 106–07). On the contrary, the army in the north banded together against the Byzantine commanders and rebelled, either shifting their allegiance to an alternative polity centered on the Lombards or simply going rogue (see pp. 81–83). As with Stotzas, Totila, and Sinduald the Lombards provided rebelling imperial soldiers (of varied backgrounds) a political alternative (but not a new ethnicity) that was more viable than rebellion and usurpation. They were no longer imperial soldiers; they were now part of a newly created polity, the Lombard kingdom in Italy.

63 The *mag. mil.* Sisinnius is mentioned in Susa in ca. 574, in a rather peculiar relationship with the Lombards of Zaban, fleeing from Mummolus (Greg. *Hist.* 4.44); The *mag. mil.* Francio is mentioned by Paul around Lake Como up to ca. 586 (*HL* 3.27).

2 Fragmentation (569–74)

The ‘568 army’ swept through northern Italy. Without Narses to coordinate a defense, the rebelling troops ravaged the land unopposed: the ‘consular source’ clearly recorded the devastations during the period. This source also records the name of their leader, the Lombard king Alboin. Alboin facilitated the transition between a rebelling army and a ‘barbarian nation’, a fundamental rebranding for the political viability of any rebellion. More pragmatically, a centralized command could rally their scrambled forces and solve the supply problems that had led them to rebel in the first place. This chapter suggests that the royal-blooded Alboin was the ideal candidate. He managed to establish ‘Lombard’ as the political face of the movement. He guaranteed the rebellion would not be quenched. He fell short, however, of the state-building necessary to consolidate a kingdom. His reign was short and ended in murder. His demise was soon followed by that of his successor, Cleph. Stateless, Italy turned into an in-between zone in which military manpower was available for hire. This chapter tackles the consequences of the rebellion: first, it analyzes the surviving evidence for Alboin and Cleph and the first attempts of organization; second, it turns to the mechanisms of accommodation, and how the rebelling soldiers—now generically called Lombards—attempted to rewire the ineffective imperial logistics to supply for themselves.

Alboin king

The sources for 569–74 are more limited than the sources for the advent of the Lombards in 569. Of the three sources for the period (pp. 11–19), only two preserved information about Alboin and Cleph, namely John of Biclarum and the ‘consular source’. Most of the available information comes from sources later in date and of legendary nature. This material combines the early years in Italy with the previous history of the Lombards and their kings—broadly the material preserved in Book 2 of the *HL*. This narrative can be thus summarized: (1) Before entering Italy, Alboin (king of the Lombards after Audoin) attacked and destroyed the Gepids, old enemies of the

Lombards, capturing along with the booty Rosemund, the king's daughter (*HL* 1.27); (2) By Narses's invitation, Alboin entered Italy (*HL* 2.5), waltzing in from Venetia to Pavia, and conquering most of the peninsula, except for Rome and Ravenna, and a few fortresses on the coast (*HL* 2.9, 12, 25–27); (3) After seven years, Rosemund avenged her father and murdered Alboin (*HL* 2.28); (4) Cleph replaced Alboin, but, on account of his ruthless rule, he was murdered; after his death the Lombard monarchy was suppressed by the dukes and Italy descended into violence (*HL* 2.31–32).

This section intends to extricate distorting contemporary perspectives from Paul's narrative in order to address the first years of the Lombards on the basis of the earliest sources. The Pauline text described the conquest of Italy around Alboin, and that remains a good place to start. Alboin's story revolves around three interconnected themes: first, the destruction of the Gepids and the capture of Rosemund; second, the conquest of Italy; and finally the revenge of Rosemund and the murder of the king. This section tackles them in this order.

The defeat of the Gepids and the end of the Pannonian kingdom

Alboin was central to the developments of the late 560s and early 570s. When the rebellion broke out in Italy, he was the best candidate to lead: he came from a royal line of a known nation, one that could claim a respectable past in Roman ethnography; he was also, by his mother's family, an heir of Theodoric (*Proc. Bella* 8.25.11–15); by marriage, he established good relations with the Franks (*Greg. Hist.* 4.3, cf. *Ep. Aust.* 8).¹ Alboin's background in Pannonia is, however, mostly absent from contemporary sources, and the information on him relates mainly to his father Audoin, who ruled the Lombards in Pannonia from the 540s to 550s (or maybe as late as 560s).² Audoin chanced to be on Procopius's radar, and thus the latter's *History of the Wars* preserves information about the Pannonian king (Sarantis 2016b, esp. 29–40). According to Procopius, Audoin deposed the seated king, the minor Waltari, and assumed the control of the kingdom (c.549), not without internal resistance (*Bella* 7.35.17–18).³ Audoin's success depended on Byzantine backing and his good relations with Justinian, who favored the Lombards over the Gepids, leading to grants of land in Noricum/Pannonia in exchange for military service.⁴

1 On the context, see Werner 1962, 140–41. Schmidt (1969 [1941], 539–40) has

suggested that Audoin's dealings with the Franks, which resulted in the marriage of Alboin to Chlosind might indicate Lombard participation in Frankish clashes with the empire on the Alps. On Alboin, see Mor 1964; Gschwantler 1976; Schneider 1972, 20–23; Frohlich 1980, 62–70; Christou 1991, 115–24; Pohl 2007a; Borri 2011, and more recently, Borri 2016.

- 2 The Pannonian Kingdom of the Lombards controlled parts of Pannonian for most of the sixth century, only to come to an end in the 570s (see pp. 48–49). Scholarship usually takes for granted that the Italian kingdom stands as a continuation of the Pannonian one, although, as argued here, the connection is not necessarily supported by contemporary sources. Most analyses rely heavily on Paul the Deacon (often at the expense of Procopius, points out Pohl 1996, 27–28). For the scholarship, see Werner 1962; Bóna 1976; Pohl 1980, but see also Sarantis's reassessment of the Balkans in Sarantis 2009; Sarantis 2016b, 266–78, 300–19.
- 3 Audoin persecuted Hildigisal, according to Procopius the rightful heir of the throne (8.27.1) until he finally managed to have him killed (8.28.28).
- 4 Justinian's endgame was probably containing the Gepids and regaining possession of Sirmium. Sarantis (2016a, 27–38) has recently reevaluated the threat of the Gepids in the Balkans, and suggested the Byzantines were more concerned than previously thought about the balance of the region. Procopius (*Bella* 7.34) portrays both Lombards and Gepids petitioning Justinian for help, with full use of his traditional Thucydidean speeches. For Justinian's support of the Lombards under Audoin, see *Bella* 7.33.10 (settlement in Noricum/Pannonia), 8.18.2 (expect Byzantine as allies), 8.25.7 (alliance with Justinian against the Gepids), 8.25.15, 8.26.19, 8.30.18, 8.31.5 (sent assistance to Narses against Totila); Justinian married Audoin to Amalafrida, one of Theodoric heirs the emperor kept in Constantinople (8.25.11–12); nonetheless, Justinian also found it useful to keep Hildigisal, the legitimate heir to the Lombard monarchy, in Constantinople, instead of delivering him to Audoin (8.27.4–5).

In Paul's narrative, presumably following the *Origo*, after succeeding Audoin (*HL* 1.27; *Origo* c. 5), Alboin entered an alliance with the Avars (which Paul calls 'Huns') and with their help destroyed the Gepids, killing their king Cunimund (from whose skull he made a goblet) and capturing his daughter, Rosemund. Still according to Paul, given that Alboin's wife, the Frankish princess Chlothsind, had died at some point before the victory over the Gepids, Alboin married Rosemund, who in due time killed him to avenge her father (*HL* 1.27, 2.28).

The contemporary evidence presents a different picture. Procopius indeed refers to the conflicts between the Pannonian Lombards and the Gepids, and to how Justinian, even if usually favoring the Lombards, craftily kept both peoples in check by using one against the other.⁵ Procopius's narrative, however, stops at 552; his last information on the Lombards is that Narses sent the allied Lombard forces in Italy back home, thanking them with gifts, albeit reproaching their unruly behaviour (*Bella* 8.33.2–3). The evidence for the next two decades (552–72) is mostly fragmentary, and consequently the defeat of the Gepids alluded by Paul is poorly attested. Two near-

contemporary sources preserve information on the conflicts between Gepids and Lombards in the late 560s: Menander, whose work (surviving only in fragments) was composed under Maurice (582–602),⁶ and John of Biclarum, who, although finishing his work only around 602, was living in Constantinople at least until 578 (pp. 14–15).

Menander confirms Paul's account of Alboin's conflict against Cunimund and the negotiations between the Lombards and the Avars, whom Alboin convinced to help against the Gepids on the grounds of their mutual enmity against the Byzantines (in addition to a tenth of the Lombards' livestock and half of the booty, in case of victory) (*Frg.* 12.1–2). Still according to Menader, the Lombards also tried to get imperial support, but the emperor evasively committed not to commit and stayed out of the conflict. The Gepids sent their own embassy to Justin II (565–78), who was unwilling to trust Cunimund, but who did not want to openly break the alliance with the Gepids (*Frg.* 12.2). The fragments do not offer a precise date for the negotiation, nor do they include the results of the fight.

- 5 The conflict between the two kingdoms, however, should be traced originally to Justinian's interventions in the area, see *Proc. Bella*, 7.341–2, 7.35.19; compare with *Proc. Aned.* 10.5–10.
- 6 Given that Menander survived only in fragments, it is not possible to fully grasp the author's intentions. Menander was commissioned by Maurice (*Frg.* 1.1): considering the emperor's renewed interest in Italy (see pp. 100–07), the work may be skewed against the Lombards, then enemies of his patron. On Menander, see the Introduction of Blockley's edition, in Blockley 1985, 1–30, see also Baldwin 1978; Whitby 1992, 39–45, more recently, see Cataudella 2003, 422–29; Treadgold 2007, 293–99.

A later anecdote, however, may point to the outcomes of this campaign. Theophylact Symocatta recounts that, during the last days of emperor Maurice (582–602), a Gepid soldier was accused of possessing a stolen belt (*Theo. Sim.* 6.8).⁷ He claimed, in his defense, that he acquired the item from the bastard son of king 'Albuis', whom he had killed in the war against the Lombards. The reason for this war, the soldier reported, was that the Gepid king 'Conimundus' wanted revenge against 'Albuis', who had raped his daughter—that is the earliest mention of the connection between Alboin and the princess. With the support of the Byzantines, the Gepids defeated 'Albuis' and, amongst the spoils, claimed the soldier, was that belt. The Gepid was caught in his lie by one of the judge's assistants, who realized the war happened thirty years before the theft and that the accused was not old enough to have lived through it. The veracity of the tale notwithstanding, the way Theophylact refers to Alboin's

defeat and the remarks about the wit of the assistant to spot the flaws in the soldier's chronology suggest that the battle was of general knowledge in the 630s, when Theophylact was writing. Given that the story is supposed to have taken place at the end of Maurice's reign (c.600), the battle should be dated to the late 560s, that is, around the time Alboin moved to Italy. If the campaign described by Theophylact was the one whose preparation Menander recounts, it was a Lombard defeat.

John of Biclarum is the second source for the war between Lombards and Gepids and, in a difference from Theophylact's anecdote, John reports a Lombard victory. According to him, Cunimund died in the field and his grandson Reotilan, together with the royal treasure, was brought to Constantinople by an Arian bishop named Trasaric (Joh. Bic. s.a. 572.1). Because of his position and proximity to the events, John of Biclarum is certainly the most reliable witness. Similarly to Paul, John grants the final victory to the Lombards. His dating, however, contradicts Paul's sequence of events: for John, the destruction of the Gepids happened in the sixth year of Justin, which he dated as 572 but was actually 571, that is, the year before Alboin's death in Italy in 572 (which he places in 573.1).⁸ Thus, the Gepid kingdom came to an end at least two years *after* Alboin entered Italy, and not in the year before it. That inversion not only breaks Paul's narrative but also calls into question his causalities (for instance, the role of Rosemund). For John's narrative, however, that chronology causes no problems, since, although he attributes the defeat of the Gepids to the Lombards, he does not mention Alboin as their leader.

7 On Theophylact, see Veh 1957; Whitby 1988, 1992, 45–54, 1997; Treadgold 2007, 329–40.

8 Note that John of Biclarum's chronology is problematic, and his dating system for the events in Spain seems to be inconsistent with his dating system for the events in the East. Mommsen, in his edition, noticing the consistent discrepancy of the dates, argued that John of Biclarum's dates should be adjusted by about a year after the given imperial year, on account of an error in the last entry of Victor of Tunnuna, whose chronicle John of Biclarum continued. Hence, Joh. Bic. s.a. 572 refers to 571—this chronology is generally accepted (e.g., Modéran 2003, 660, n. 61). More recently, Hartmann and Collins (2001, 63) have scrutinized John of Biclarum's dating system for a pattern but found it lacking. Notwithstanding, dates tend to diverge by a year or two: for the argument here, such deviation would still firmly place the destruction of the Gepid after 569. An unlikely deviation of five years would be necessary to pull the battle back to the traditionally accepted date (567). I have adopted Hartmann's dating (571) for the battle.

Near-contemporary sources, then, inform of two (most likely)

distinct battles between the Lombards and the Gepids.⁹ In the first one, in the late 560s, Lombards supported by the Avars (Menander) clashed against the Gepids supported by Byzantium (Theophylact). Alboin commanded the Lombards and was then defeated (Theophylact). In the second war, dated by John to 571, the Lombards destroyed the Gepid kingdom (John of Biclarum). This time, there is no mention of who commanded the Lombards, nor information about alliances, although the fact that defeated Gepids sought asylum in Constantinople suggests some continuity of the friendship with Byzantium. This documentation does not link the defeat of the Gepids with Alboin's advent to Italy, calling into question the traditional concatenation of events, that is, Alboin's victory and destruction of the Gepids followed by his conquest of Italy. If the Lombards indeed destroyed the Gepids only in 571 (or even as early as 569), as John of Biclarum says, Alboin, who had been in Italy since 569, was no longer commanding them—note that John never names who was commanding the Lombards. Even though Alboin—and, for a fact, his father before him—had a long history of conflicts with the Gepids (to which Menander also refers), the final battle between Lombards and Gepids happened *after* Narses moved Alboin and his troops into Italy. Menander indeed describes Alboin plotting to destroy the Gepids at some point in the 560s, if Theophylact's anecdote can be trusted, but his campaign probably ended in a Lombard defeat.

This new chronology produces three corollaries. First, it attests that, as suggested in [Chapter 1](#), Narses did not relocate the Lombard kingdom in Pannonia into Italy but recruited from various peoples instead, including a number of Pannonian Lombards. The Pannonian kingdom survived after Alboin moved into Italy, since it was still around to defeat the Gepids in 571. Shortly after, the kingdom was absorbed by the Avars,¹⁰ which presumably explains why, by the 580s, the 'consular source' believed the Lombards abandoned and burned Pannonia before moving to Italy.¹¹ Second, this new chronology suggests that Alboin was not in control of the Pannonian kingdom by 568 when he was enlisted by Narses, since it is unlikely that he would move to Italy with some of the Lombards, while leaving his kingdom behind to its own demise. The third corollary refers to another of Paul's chains of events: since Alboin did not destroy the Gepid kingdom, he did not *necessarily* capture his second wife (Rosemund?) then, nor marry her before entering Italy and, consequently, his first wife, the Frankish princess Chlothsind, was not necessarily dead by 567. The marriage between Alboin and Chlothsind, attested by Gregory of Tours and by a letter from bishop Nicetius, certainly happened before 572 but not necessarily before 567, as usually dated (*Ep. Aust.* 8. See also Greg. *Hist* 4.41).¹²

- 9 Sarantis (2016b, 378–79; 2016a, 51, 53) dates the first one to 566 and the second to 567. The rationale, however, is that the battle *has* to happen before the Lombard invasion in 568 (*sic*), to account for Paul the Deacon’s report.
- 10 For the advance of the Avars, see Hauptmann 1927–28, 151–52; Goubert 1951a, 52; Goffart 1957, 75, n. 2, more recently, Sarantis 2016b, 375–89. More generally on the Avars, see Avenarius 1974; Pohl 1988, 1997b, more recently, see Pohl 2003a; Daim 2003, for the Roman response to the Avar threat, see esp. Whitby 1988.
- 11 Sources that mention the Lombards moving with families and property to Italy: Mar. Av. s.a. 569; Greg. *Hist.* 4.41; cf. *HL.* 2.7, which mentions the Lombards left Pannonia to ‘their friends, the Huns’ (that is, the Avars) on the condition that they could return if necessary; the *Origo Cod. Got.* stipulates a timeframe: 200 years.
- 12 The dating of the marriage is connected to dating *Ep. Aust.* 8, traditionally dated between 561 and 567; see Malaspina 2001, 86, n. 188; Borri 2016, 37–40. The *terminus post quem* is rather simple, since Nicetius never mentioned Chlothar, and addresses Clothind’s brothers as ‘Francorum reges, tuos germanos’, implying that the letter was drafted after the death of Chlothar in 561. The *terminus ante quem*, however is connected to Alboin’s marriage to Rosemund and, hence, the defeat of the Gepids that must have happened before the Lombards’ entry in Italy in 568, all according to Paul the Deacon. Dismissing Paul’s narrative, it all falls apart. If, however, the letter from Nicetius actually addressed Chlothind in Italy and not in Pannonia, it is easier not only to understand one of Nicetius’s main concerns, that is, that Gothic envoys were preaching Arianism to Alboin. Now that Alboin was ruling a part of Italy that held a significant Arian population, it was natural for the local Gothic church to reach out to him. It also makes Nicetius’s invitations for Alboin to send envoys to Saint Peter and Saint Paul and even to St. Martin of Tours a more feasible suggestion.

The later history of the Lombard kingdom in Pannonia probably has much to do with the fragility of Alboin’s family’s grasp on power.¹³ After coming to power with imperial support, Audoin made sure to dispose of the former royal family, expelling Hildigisal (Proc. *Bella* 7.35.17–22, 8.27.1, 8.28.28). Imperial support, however, crumbled after Audoin (or after Justinian). Menander indeed hints at a change in imperial policy after Justinian: unlike his predecessor, Justin was no longer supporting the Lombards (who then, according to Menander, had to turn to the Avars); Theophylact’s anecdote goes even further, suggesting the Byzantines sent troops to succour the Gepids (Patoura 1997; Sarantis 2009, 2016b, 300–12). Such shift in policy indeed agrees with Justin’s policy of reducing support to barbarian *gentes*.¹⁴ After Justinian, Alboin (who succeeded his father at some unknown date) failed to guarantee Byzantine support against the Gepids; worse than that, Cunimund, the Gepid king, outsmarted him and used the Byzantines in his favor. It is tempting to suggest that the party that had brought Audoin—and eventually also Alboin—to power, without Byzantine backing, and after a military defeat was overthrown. If that was the case, Alboin could have found himself

exiled or expelled, not unlike Hildigisal before him, who had also fled to Italy (*Bella* 7.35.22). At this point, offering his services to Narses was a logical next step. Finally, without Alboin, the Pannonian Lombards eventually defeated the Gepids in 571, only to be incorporated later on by the Avars.

- 13 For the internal developments in the Balkans, see; Sarantis 2016b, 375–89. Note, however, Sarantis’s dependency on Paul the Deacon for his take on the Lombards.
- 14 For example, Men. *Frg.* 14, Joh. Eph. 6.24 (Justin refuses tributes to the Avars); Men. *Frg.* 15–17 (refuses grants to Persia). See Stein 1919, 1–25; Jones 1964a, 304; Ostrogorsky 1980, 72–73; Louth 2008, 124–25.

The conquest of Italy and the death of Alboin

The contemporary sources are also scanty on what happened once the Lombards arrived in Italy. While the ‘chronicle source I’ preserved no information after 569, the ‘consular source’, especially interested in the establishment of the Lombards in the north, seems to have described the event only in general terms. The text briefly informs that Alboin ‘occupied’ (*occupavit*, in Mar. Av. s.a. 569) or ‘sought’ (*petiit*, in Greg. *Hist.* 4.41) Italy. Additionally, the ‘consular source’ preserved information about Alboin’s death, to which John of Biclarum also attests. The king’s murder at the hands of his wife, spiced as it was with revenge and betrayal, soon became a legend, and, as such stories often do, grew more and more as time passed by. As for the actual conquest, the earliest surviving detailed description is in the eighth-century *HL*, which explains in part the centrality of the Pauline narrative for the scholarly reconstruction of the events (e.g., Mor 1964; Delogu 1980, 12–16; Jarnut 1982, 33–36; Christie 1995, 73–79; Pohl 2007a). It is necessary, however, to underline the limits of Paul’s narrative and investigate support in contemporary evidence.

According to the *HL*, the conquest can be thus summarized: (1) After Narses’s invitation, Alboin entered Italy and established the first duchy in Friuli, selecting as duke his nephew Gisulf; to accept the offer, Gisulf demanded to select the best *fara*, to which Alboin acceded (*HL* 2.9); (2) Alboin then met Felix, the bishop of Treviso, as the king was about to cross the River Piave: Alboin acceded to his petition to confirm Church properties in the region, producing some sort of official document, a ‘praeambulum’ (*HL* 2.12);¹⁵ (3) The king then captured Vicenza, Verona, and all the cities in Venetia, except Padua, Monselice and Mantua (*HL* 2.14); (4) The Lombards then captured Milan ‘at the beginning of the third indiction, in the third day before the Nones of September’ (i.e., September 3rd 569), and ‘all the cities

of Liguria except those close to the sea' (*HL* 2.25); (5) Paul then describes the three-year siege of Padua, and how Alboin, in order to finally enter the city, had to abjure an oath to kill all the citizens—only thus would his horse cross the gate of St. John, leading Alboin into the city (*HL* 2.27); (6) Finally, after ruling Italy for three years and six months (cf. *Origo*, three years), Alboin was murdered by a man named Peredeo, at the instigation of his wife Rosemund (the daughter of the Gepid king Alboin had slaughtered) and Helmechis (a squire). The wrath of the queen was unleashed when Alboin forced her to drink from a goblet the king had made from the skull of her father. Helmechis and Rosemund fled to Ravenna, and eventually killed each other at the instigation of Longinus, the praetorian prefect. Peredeo was taken to Constantinople, where he died, not before defeating a lion at the circus, being blinded, and killing two of the emperor's patricians (*HL* 2.28–30).

Apart from a longer version of what by then was the well-known story of the murder of Alboin, the narrative consists mostly of a collection of legends and anecdotes from locations with which Paul was familiar. There are three different types of source behind those stories. The first consists of stories connected with places Paul had lived in, such as his native Friuli and Pavia, where he had served under Ratchis.¹⁶ These tales fit the pattern of origin legends: in the first case, for the duchy and the aristocracy of Friuli, of which Paul was a scion; in the second, for the special relationship between Pavia and the Lombard kings, which, by the late eighth century, was certainly a well-established tradition.¹⁷ Similarly, Paul used local stories to expand the narrative around Alboin's murder. For example, he learnt the story of the skull goblet from Ratchis, who used to show the goblet around as a proof (*HL* 2.28). The second type of source consisted of literary material, such as the general plot of Alboin's murder Paul found in Gregory of Tours and in the *Origo*, which he then expanded and re-elaborated. Finally, Paul made use of at least one (but maybe two) non-extant earlier source to reconstruct the events. As far as we can tell, this is certain for the capture of Milan, which Paul dates to September 3rd 569 (*HL* 2.25). The notice, conspicuous by its precise dating, came either from the 'consular source' or from a later chronicle source (here, 'chronicle sources II'; see pp. 108–12) Paul seems to be using for Books 2 to 4. It is also possible that Paul had access to a second non-extant source, the *pragmaticum* Alboin supposedly gave to Felix (or a forgery that claimed so). In all, the material preserved in Paul provides interesting information on the invention of traditions in the eighth century, on his capacity to elaborate on his sources; in a very limited way, it provides a glimpse on the capture of Milan in 569 and (maybe) of Treviso at

some unknown date.

- 15 The term ‘practicum’ is a rare word in Latin, but has currency in Greek in the context of official legislation; cf. *πραγματικός* (e.g., *Pragmatica Sanctio*).
- 16 For Paul’s biography, see Goffart 1988, 333–47. For Paul’s connection to Ratchis, see *HL* 2.28.
- 17 As Walter Pohl has already pointed out, the three-year siege is recurrent in Paul’s narrative, and is most likely symbolic; see; 1993, 292. Paul uses the same three years to describe Attila’s siege of Aquileia (*Hist. Rom.* 14.9) and Theodoric’s siege of Ravenna (*Hist. Rom.* 15.17). The reference may look to II Rg 17 and the three-year siege of Samaria by the Assyrians eventually leading to the Babylon captivity (II Rg 24), all prompted by the Samaritan king Osee’s (and Israel’s) sins against God. For the importance of Pavia for the Lombard kingdom, see Harrison 1993, 62–94, *passim*.; Brogiolo 2000.

The contemporary and near-contemporary material casts a different light onto the first years of the Lombards in Italy. As mentioned above, there is no information for the occupation, besides the fact that Alboin and the Lombards ‘occupied’ or ‘sought’ Italy ‘intending to move there’ (*illuc commanere deliberantes*, in *Greg. Hist.* 4.41). In addition, Marius of Avenches suggests there were repercussions across the Alps, both as localized raiding parties and capture of slaves (*Mar. Av. s.a.* 569). Some evidence emerges from the murder of Alboin, recorded both by John of Biclarum and the ‘consular source’:

<i>‘Consular source’</i>		
<i>Greg. Hist. 4.41</i>	<i>Mar. Av. s.a. 572</i>	<i>Joh. Bic. s. a. 573.1</i>
After the death of Chlothasind, Alboin’s wife, he took another wife, whose father he had recently killed. Because of that, the woman always hated her husband and was waiting for the moment in which she could avenge the wrongs done to her father. And thus it came about that becoming enamored with one of the servants, she poisoned her husband. After his death, she fled with the servant, but they were both caught and killed.	That year, Alboin, king of the Lombards, was killed in Verona by his own people, that is, Hilmaegis along with others, with the agreement of Alboin’s wife. And the above-mentioned Hilmegis with the said wife, whom he married, surrendered at Ravenna to the empire with all the treasure, both that which Alboin brought from Pannonia, as well as that which the king had gathered in Italy, along with part of the army.	Alboin, king of the Lombards, was killed in the night by his own people at the instigation of his wife; his treasure, with the queen along, fell into the hands of the Roman empire, and the Lombards remained without king and treasure.

It is clear that Gregory heavily re-elaborated the story, and consequently it is impossible to reconstruct the ‘consular source’ for this entry beyond what Marius preserved. All sources agree that the king was killed by his own people, with involvement of his wife: note

that there is no reference to Rosemund or the Gepids, and that neither Marius nor John mentioned the murder of her father. Again, both agree that the murderer fled to Ravenna (or ‘the Romans’) together with the royal treasure. In addition to that, Marius provides two important details: first, that the murder took place in Verona (repeated in Fredegar 3.65–66, the *Origo* c. 5, and the *CH* 1521), and second, that a part of the army followed the party that got rid of Alboin.

Thus, there is contemporary evidence for three cities being controlled by Alboin: Verona (attested by Marius, possibly from the ‘consular source’), Milan (attested by Paul, also possibly from the ‘consular source’), and Treviso (also attested by Paul, from a less certain source, the *praeumaticum*). The same three cities show up in another kind of evidence: the name of units that left the Lombards and rejoined the Byzantine army. There are three units in the Byzantine army that may have been among those defecting (Mar. Av. s.a. 572). Both the *numerus Mediolanensium* (Milan) and the *numerus Veronensium* were garrisoned (Verona) in Ravenna during the seventh century, while a third unit—the *numerus Tarvisianorum* (Treviso) was located in Grado, at an unknown date.¹⁸ It is likely that these were units that broke away from the Lombards in 572. That would fit with Alboin’s control of units originally from Verona—to which other sources attest—and Milan, and possibly also Treviso. (Admittedly, the Trevisan unit could have different origins, since it is impossible to be sure about the date it was moved to Grado.)

The most striking difference between this limited list and Paul’s is the absence of Friuli.¹⁹ For Paul, Alboin created the Friulian duchy as he crossed into Italy, and handed it to Gisulf, his nephew (*HL* 2.9), who ruled Friuli until 610 when he was killed by the Avars. He was first replaced by his two older sons Tato and Caco (*HL* 4.38), then by his brother Grasulf (*HL* 4.39). The king’s creation of the duchy under Gisulf is a central piece of the Pauline narrative, accounting not only for the origins of Paul’s homeland but also for the central connection between Grimoald (Gisulf’s younger son) and Alboin.²⁰ It seems that Paul had a source for the dukes of Friuli, probably something similar to the surviving list of dukes of Benevento.²¹ For some of them, Paul had very little to report,²² for others he added local legends (and a good amount of creative writing). Gisulf received the latter treatment: since he was presumably listed as the first duke, Paul assumed he was directly connected to Alboin and thus installed by the king as he entered Italy from Pannonia. The story, however, falls apart upon closer inspection of chronology: Gisulf is first mentioned in 568 receiving Friuli from Alboin (*HL* 2.9); he is mentioned again only in 602, making peace with Agilulf (*HL* 4.27), then dying fighting the

Avars in 610, leaving then a son too young to ride a horse (*HL* 4.37)—a longevity that stretches belief. Conversely, it is impossible to square Paul's narrative with contemporary evidence.²³ Two contemporary letters in the *Epistolae Austrasicae*, a collection not available to Paul,²⁴ refer to the troops in Friuli. The letters, one dated to before 581 and the other to 590, mention Grasulf as an independent commander in Friuli in the early 580s, and Gisulf as a son who succeeded him in 590.²⁵ Two decades separate Alboin and Gisulf, and the connection between them is more likely a result of Paul's intent to link Alboin with Friuli, made easier by the chronological laxness his sources imposed.

- 18 *N. Mediolanensium: P. Ital.* 20 (610), still operational in 710, when it was among the troops mobilized by duke George in 710 (see Agn. c. 140); *n. Veronensium: P. Ital.* 22 (639); *n. Travianorum: CIL* v. 1591 (not dated). I see no reason to follow the traditional explanation that those troops were brought together by refugees of conquered cities; for example, see Brown 1984, 86, followed by Christie 1991, 104. Traditionally, scholarship defended the idea that the troops that abandoned Alboin were then moved to Syria, see Stein 1919, 70; Schmidt 1969 [1941], 595.
- 19 For what follows, see Fabbro forthcoming 2020.
- 20 See Fabbro forthcoming 2020.
- 21 Compare with *Catalogus regum Langobardorum et ducum Beneventanorum*, ed. Waitz, in *MGH SRL*, 490ff.
- 22 For example, Grasulf (*HL* 4.39, 50), Ago (*HL* 4.50), Landari (*HL* 5.24), Corvulus (*HL* 6.25); for a list of Friulian dukes (mostly based on the *HL*), see Gasparri 1978, 65–72.
- 23 The traditional solution has been to try to hammer Paul and the *Ep. Aust.* into a single narrative. To do so, it is necessary to assume that Paul mentions two different people named Gisulf: the first one (Gisulf I) was the one chosen by Alboin to rule Friuli (*HL* 2.9), while the second one (Gisulf II) was the son of Grasulf I (mentioned in *Ep. Aust.* 48, but not in Paul), and was the one who came to terms with Agilulf (*HL* 4.27). Grasulf I was the father of Gisulf II and (to fit the chronology) brother of Gisulf I. Finally, Grasulf II, as mentioned by Paul (*HL* 4.39), is Gisulf II's brother. At no point, however, does Paul hint that Gisulf in *HL* 2.9 and *HL* 4.27 are two different people. For the traditional reading, see the biographic entries for Gisulf I and II and Grasulf I and II in *PLRE*, III, 537–38; Jarnut 1972, 354–57; Gasparri 1978, 65–67.
- 24 Though Paul might have been familiar with an earlier version of the *Chronica patriarcharum Gradensium*, which has a quick mention of Gisulf nominating John as abbot at Aquileia, with the consent of Agilulf; see *Chr. patr. Grad.* 3, cf. *HL* 4.33. One certainly influenced the other.
- 25 *Ep. Aust.* 48 and 41. The dating of *Ep. Aust.* 48 is contentious: The only possible dating is the *terminus ante quem*, the death of Gogo on 581. Traditional reading prefers to see Gogo writing the letter in the period during which he held much power, thus, after the death of Sigibert (575), when he acted as regent of the infant Childebert II, hence closer to his death in 581; see Reverdy 1913, 64; Stein 1919, 108; Löhlein 1932, 64–65; Goubert 1951b, 197; Bachrach 1994; Pohl 1997a, 100. Goffart (1957, 78–79) has proposed a new dating, ignoring the idea that a powerful king as Sigibert would sign his own letters, and moved

The history of late sixth-century Friuli is much more complicated than Paul let out (or understood). The region was central for the deployment of troops and, unlike the Po Valley, maintained strong ties with the Mediterranean after 569, even in the mainland *castra* (Villa 1998; Wickham 2000, 819, 823).²⁶ There, the breakaway from the imperial government had a religious undertone: the region was the center of the tricapitoline resistance to Byzantine ecclesiastical policy (Azzara 2007, esp. Pohl 2007b; Sotinel 2007). After the rebellion of 568, the army in Cividale still had to face the Avar threat, which escalated in the last quarter of the sixth century (pp. 101–04), producing a need for unity and organization, but also allowing for the strengthening of a local military class—this group, and not Alboin, is the most likely sponsor of the independent government in Friuli. At the same time, the perpetuation of the tricapitoline schism provided an enduring basis for a strong sense of community. Combined, all those factors produced a situation in Friuli in which both seceding and remaining in the empire made sense, allowing the local duke to play with both alternatives. This ambiguity was only curtailed after the reorganization of Lombard kingship under Agilulf in the early seventh century (see [Chapter 4](#)).

This reassessment suggests the first years of the Lombards can be thus rewritten: as proposed in [Chapter 1](#), the ‘568 army’ moved into Italy by Narses in 569, rebelled and flocked behind the Lombard elements under Alboin’s command; the contemporary sources suggest that the rebelling soldiers took control of at least two cities, namely Milan (in September of that same year) (*HL* 2.25) and Verona (at an unknown date) (Mar. Av. s.a. 572; *CH*. 1521; Fred. 3.66), both to the north of the Po, but possibly also Treviso (*HL* 2.12), on the access to Venetia. Milan was probably the furthest west Alboin’s rebellion could go, since there is evidence for a *magister militum* in Susa around 574/5 (one Sisinnius, Greg. *Hist.* 4.44) and another one in Como until the 590s (a certain Francio, *HL* 3.27).²⁷ The position of these *magistri militum* in relation to the Lombards, however, seems to be rather more ambiguous: breaking away from the empire did not necessarily mean joining the Lombards, as the following decades clearly showed (see pp. 81–84). In any case, given that there are no reports of resistance, it is likely that Milan, Verona, and (possibly) Treviso turned voluntarily to the Lombards, similarly to what happened a few decades earlier when Totila used the rebellion in the Po Valley to rekindle the Gothic resistance (Proc. *Bella* 7.1.25–27). In any case, after 569, Alboin assumed control of a significant part of the Po Valley (but likely not all of it, and not Venetia and Histria), and ruled it ‘as a king’ (*ius regale*), as the seventh-century Continuation of Prosper puts it (*CH*

1521). In this period, Alboin presumably attempted to attend to the essential logistical needs of the troop, by redirecting taxation on the territories he commanded (see pp. 58–64). It is tempting to place Alboin's marriage to the Frankish princess Chlothasind at this point, around 570, as an attempt to connect with Franks on the other side of the border. That would explain better not only Alboin's intention in marrying a Frankish princess, namely to secure good relations with the new neighbors to the north, but would also provide another instance of the long political project of the Franks to control northern Italy.²⁸ In any case, in 572 the king was killed by an internal intrigue that involved his wife (who Gregory assured was no longer Chlothasind, *Hist.* 4.41), probably together with a part of his close circle. The next section shows how financial problems may be among the causes of this coup. The conspirators took hold of the royal treasure and fled with a part of the troops to Ravenna.

- 26 For the connection between the impact of imported goods and the advance of the Lombards, see Marazzi 1998.
- 27 For the date, see Hartmann 1897b, 59. In 599, there was also a loyal *mag. mil.* in Istria: Greg. *Reg.* 9.160 (a. 599) see PLRE, 3.1, Gulfaris, 563 (= Ulfaris, Trent duke that rebelled against Agilulf, *HL* 4.3, PLRE 3.2, p. 1387?).
- 28 A later source, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Thematibus*, 2.11 mentions Franks and Lombards cooperating in Veneto in the 550s. It is hard to establish the reliability of such a late report; cf. Bognetti 1966c, 456 and n. 50; (NB Bognetti's reference is wrong).

After the events, Alboin's murder very soon became a legend. It is clear that, in the 580s, Gregory of Tours was already elaborating on the story, turning it into one of his moral lessons. Thus, the wicked king entered Italy, killed priests, and despoiled churches, and was punished by an ignominious death at the hands of the woman whose father he had killed: the king died as a direct result of this evil deed but also as a general punishment for his wickedness. To wrap up his tale, Gregory had the wife and servant killed, since it would be unacceptable to have a murderous wife with a happy ending.²⁹ The connection with Rosemund and the Gepids appeared only in the seventh century, in different forms, first in the East (in which Alboin kidnaps the Gepid princess, Theo. Sim. 6.8) and then in the West (in which Alboin marries her).³⁰

Cleph and the end of monarchy

To replace Alboin, the Lombards elected Cleph, one of the Lombard dukes (Mar. Av. s.a. 572.).³¹ The sources for Cleph are extremely meager, and the only near-contemporary source to report on his reign

is Marius of Avenches, presumably using the ‘consular source’. Paul the Deacon’s chapter on Cleph seems to have also come from the same source:

- 29 For Gregory’s style and his use of anecdotes, see Goffart 1988, 168–74.
 30 The first mention is in *CH* 1521; later, *Origo* c. 5. For a recent overview of the development of the legend, see Borri 2011. The tragic story of the hero king spread far and wide, as Paul suggested (*HL* 1.27). For Agnellus, in ninth-century Ravenna, the story, recounted in many lively details, was a warning for men to better control their wives (Agn. c. 96–97).
 31 For the scholarship on Cleph, see Schneider 1972, 23–24; Frohlich 1980, 73–75; Delogu 1980, 17, 25, 30; Wickham 1981, 31–32; Jarnut 1982, 36–7; Everett 2000, 68–69, and more recently; Jarnut 2003, 415, 426; Christie 1995, 66, 82, and more generally, 2006, 369–80; Capo 2004, 246.

Mar. Av. s.a. 573.1, 574.1	<i>HL</i> 2.31
in that year, a Lombard duke called Cleph was made king of that people, and many higher ranked (<i>seniore</i>) and lower ranked (<i>mediocres</i>) people were killed by him. In the next year, king Cleph was killed by one of his servants.	All the Lombards in Italy, in common agreement, established Cleph, one of the most noble of their men, king, in the city of Pavia. Here he annihilated a great number of powerful Romans (<i>Romanorum potentes uiros</i>), some by the sword, and others he drove out of Italy. Cleph, a year and six months after he had obtained the kingship with his wife Masane, had his throat cut by one of the servants in his entourage.

Although there is little textual similarity, the variations seem well within range of Paul’s re-elaboration of his sources,³² and, given that he did not have access to Marius, it is safe to assume they are relying on the same text. *HL* 2.31 is the only reference in Paul that can, by comparing his text with Marius’s, be traced directly to the ‘consular source’, and is, not surprisingly, one of the very few entries Paul used from that source that he could not find in Gregory’s *Histories*. Apparently, Paul favored Gregory’s narrative style over the terse chronicle entries of the ‘consular source’.

The traditional reading of Cleph’s reign relies on Paul, and sees Cleph killing Romans from all ranks, and the beginning of the violent occupation that continued during the interregnum (e.g., Delogu 1980, 16–19; 2004, 104–05; Jarnut 1982, 36). The main problem with following Paul’s equation of Marius’s *seniores* with *potentes Romanorum* is to identify the powerful Romans living in the regions then controlled by Cleph. If Alboin did not control, as suggested, much beyond the Po Valley from Milan to Treviso, it is hard to imagine how his successor could have controlled more than that, given that he commanded a smaller army and there are no notices of new

conquests. In the sixth century, the Po Valley was deep in Gothic territory, and it would hardly be home to *potentes viros Romanorum* in any traditional sense, i.e., senators and other aristocratic landowners.³³ Conversely, there are no clues about who Marius's *mediocres* were: was he referring to a smaller, middling group of landowners or actual peasants? It is hard to know, but certainly the Lombards could not simply kill the productive part of the population, for whatever state they were planning to put together would have to rely on them.³⁴ Marius, however, does *not* mention Romans, but simply *seniores* and *mediocres*. Paul's connection between these groups in Marius and the fate of the Roman population might owe more to his overall intention of bridging Roman and Lombard Italian histories, as well as his own experience of a nobility being killed or exiled by a conqueror (namely, the fate of Friulian nobility crushed by the Carolingians after 776) (Hlawitschka 1960, 166–67, 182, 199; Cammarosano 1998, 102–03; Delogu 1996, 301–3; Gasparri 2000a, 35–36).

³² Compare, for example, *HL* 3.29 and Greg. *Hist* 9.25 (s.a. 588).

³³ Both Procopius and Agathias attest the Goths were sent home north of the Po; see Proc. *Bella* 8.34.16, 19–24, 8.35.7–38; Agath. preaf, 1.1; cf. Agn. c. 79, Mar. Av. s.a. 554.

³⁴ As Gregory the Great clearly remarked to Agilulf a few decades later, see Greg. *Reg.* 9.66 [598].

A possible reading of Cleph's assassination is that after the death of Alboin the Lombard rebellion broke down, and many soldiers were eager to return to Byzantine service. Many soldiers broke rank with the rebels and were welcomed to rejoin the empire in Ravenna.³⁵ The absence of punishment presumably motivated other soldiers to do the same—the fear of retaliation was commonly one of the main obstacles for mutineers to surrender (Kaegi 1981, 49–50). Cleph, in command of the rebelling Lombards, had to bring the army back into control, and he probably had many killed for mutiny or desertion: not only soldiers but also well placed officials (i.e., Marius's *seniores* and *mediocres*). His actions were, however, resented: in 574, he was killed by one of his house slaves (*puer*) (Mar. Av. s.a. 574; cf. *HL* 2.31; *Origo*, c. 6; Fred. 4.45).³⁶

Traditional scholarship usually sees the death of Cleph as the collapse of the Lombard kingdom, leading to the anarchy of the interregnum (pp. 69–76). At that point, however, there was not much of a kingdom to collapse. Alboin assumed the command of the rebelling soldiers in northern Italy, but it is likely that he did not even aggregate all the rebelling forces under his command: Alboin's 'kingdom' hardly stretched beyond a rather small track of land in the

Po Valley, from Milan to Treviso. The position of the remaining military forces in the peninsula is unknown, and they were probably fomenting their own local agenda. Most conspicuously, the three *magistri militum*—one in Susa, one in the area around lake Como, and the other in Istria (one curiously named Gulfaris, of whom there is notice later in the sixth century)—and possibly another one in Trent (of whom there is no information), and what remained of the Byzantine contingent in the south, remained outside the Lombard sphere of influence at least until the state-building efforts under Authari and Agilulf (see pp. 93–97; 128ff). The legacy of Alboin was not a kingdom, but a political idea: Alboin's Lombards were a viable local allegiance to a variety of individuals—some Lombards by birth but most from various backgrounds—who were dissatisfied with the Byzantine rule of Italy. This political idea, however, did not immediately congeal into a government, and the reality on the ground remained one of chaos and fragmentation.

- 35 Agn. c. 96, suggests Longinus welcomed, together with Rosamond, a multitude of 'Lombards and Gepids' in Ravenna; the text is admittedly late and its source unknown.
- 36 Delogu suggests he may have been killed to avenge Alboin's death, which is possible, although no source points in that direction; see Delogu 1980, 17.

Settlement and collapse

In the background of the political theater, the rebels were experimenting with a different system to supply the troops—a solution for the endemic shortages they experienced under Byzantine rule. The mechanisms by which these troops coopted local supply systems have long been a major historiographic question and a central issue for the debate on the nature of the Lombard occupation. The parameters of the interactions between the incoming Lombards and the local population—in other words, the 'settlement of the Lombards'—has animated a long academic debate, which has oscillated between violent expropriation of property,³⁷ on one extreme, and peaceful accommodation, on the other.³⁸ Recent scholarship has tended towards negotiated forms of accommodation by which the Lombards would have initially been incorporated into the tax system. This tax-based accommodation stems from Walter Goffart's 'accommodation theory', a reevaluation of the process of settlement of the barbarian *gentes* on Roman soil in the fifth and sixth centuries.³⁹ This section reviews the evidence for this debate.

Accommodation

The debate on the settlement of the Lombards depends essentially on the interpretation of two passages from Paul the Deacon, namely, from *HL* 2.32 and 3.16. The two passages, totaling ten lines in a modern edition of the *HL*, have received an enormous attention from scholarship—and have been accurately described as the ‘most tortured’ passages in Paul the Deacon (Pontieri 1960, 244; Goffart 1980, 177); for Benedetto Croce, they were more commented than the Bible (Croce 1921, vol. 1, 132). The language is indeed excessively cryptic—as the myriad of explanations they received attest, and the lack of consensus confirms.⁴⁰ Appropriately, Paolo Delogu has proclaimed that any attempt to understand the complex process of settlement ‘sul fondamento di un paio di frasi tratte da una cronaca posteriore di circa duecento anni agli avvenimenti, è un’impresa non solo impossibile, ma sbagliata’ (based on a pair of sentences from a chronicle produced two centuries after the events, is not only an impossible task, but also a misconceived one) — though that certainly did not prevent him from doing exactly so (Delogu 2004, 95). Even though Paul had his own agenda in reorganizing his source material, the occurrence of terms such as *hospites*, *tributarii*, and *populi adgravati* can hardly be coincidental, and, as Pohl correctly affirmed, what he says about the process is ‘too related to the way in which other fifth- and sixth-century authors deal with the problem to be merely the creation of a late eighth-century monk’ (Pohl 1997a, 118, a point accepted in Wickham 2005, 116).

³⁷ For classical works, see Hartmann 1897b, 34–55; Hodgkin 1885, vol. 5, 150–73, more recently, Tabacco 1979; Delogu 1980, 28–31, slightly modified in 2004, 93–105.

³⁸ The classical works arguing for some element of continuity are usually skeptical of extending their finds to the Lombards; see, for example, Gaupp 1844, 503–15; Lot 1928, 1005, n. 4; 1927, 311–12. More recently, Goffart has suggested that the same mechanisms of accommodation used in the fifth century could be applied to the Lombards, see Goffart 1980, 176–205. Walter Pohl expanded this interpretation into what may be the current form, see 1997a, 112–31, 2001, with which Goffart appears to be satisfied, calling it ‘far and away the furthest-reaching recent effort to come to terms with barbarian settlement’. He does not, however, position himself, claiming that ‘[t]he Lombard evidence is so thin and so late that I have nothing more to say about Italian conditions than I have already said’ (2006, 119, n. 2).

³⁹ The literature around Goffart’s ‘accommodation theory’ has grown exponentially in the last three decades; for a recent reevaluation of the theory and its reception, see Halsall 2007, 417–54. See also Goffart’s recent exchange with Guy Halsall in Goffart 2010, cf. Halsall 2010.

⁴⁰ For an overview of the different reading, see Pontieri 1960, 237–43. More recently, see Goffart 1980, 176–205; Pohl 1997a, 2001, esp. 112–31; Delogu

In the passages, Paul the Deacon deals with the settlement of the Lombards in two different moments, first after the death of Cleph and then after the restitution of the monarchy. In the first instance, he mentions the chaos of the rule of the dukes, and how the Roman population was subjected to the Lombards and made tributary:

After [Cleph's] death the Lombards had no king for ten years, but were under dukes (...). In these days, many noble Romans (*multa nobilium Romanorum*) were killed out of greed. The remainder (*reliqui*) were divided among the 'guests' (*per hospites divisi*) and made tributaries (*tributarii*), so that they should pay a third part of their products to the Lombards.

(HL 2.32)

Paul returns to the topic in HL 3.16, when he recounts the restoration of the monarchy under Authari (for the context, see [Chapter 3](#)):

In [Authari's] days, on account of the restoration of the kingdom, the dukes of that time granted half of their resources to royal use, so that there could be a king, and from which the king and those connected to him and those enrolled in his service in many offices could be supported. The burdened people (*populi adgravati*), however, were parcelled out among their Lombard guests.

The scholarly debate derives from the difficulty in identifying the groups mentioned by Paul. In the first place, does 'remainder' (*reliqui*) in 2.32 refer to 'nobles' (*nobilium*), meaning that the nobles who were spared from massacre were submitted to tribute, or does it refer to 'Romans' (*Romanorum*), meaning the rest of the population was thus made tributary? Secondly, who were the people that Paul described in 3.16 as 'burdened' (*adgravati*), which the Lombards divided amongst themselves after the creation of the monarchy? Traditionally, scholars who accepted violent conquest understood that in 2.32 Paul meant the 'remainder of the Romans', reading in that phrase that very few nobles survived, and those who did, the Lombards deprived of their position (and of their land) and submitted to exactions with the rest of the population (e.g., Hartmann 1897b, 40–44; Lot 1927, 336; Boggetti 1968; Gasparri 1979, 272–75). Thus, by the time monarchy was reestablished in 584, the Lombards would have settled as lords over the subdued Roman population, which they distributed among themselves as serfs—usually equated with the *aldiones* of the Lombard laws (Hartmann 1897a, 1–52; Hodgkin 1885, 5, 188–89; Boggetti 1966–68, 110–40; Delogu 1980, 29–31, but compare with 2004, 93–105).

In 1980, Walter Goffart suggested a new system to understand the

settlement of the Lombards. In broad strokes, Goffart suggested that the barbarian armies were settled in the West not by rights of conquest or by expropriation of property (or redistribution along the lines of the late antique practice of *hospitalitas*), but by an organized reallocation of taxes, based on tax registers. According to this system, a specific share of the taxes (usually one or two thirds) was redirected to the barbarian army, without any changes to existing landownership (Goffart 1980, 2006, 119–83; 2010, 2013). This system, he argued, was also applied in Lombard Italy and that is what Paul is describing in *HL* 2.32 and 3.16, namely, a fiscal rearrangement (Goffart 1980, 181–84). He contested the reading of ‘remainder’ as connected to ‘Romans’, which he suggested was ‘contrary to its obvious grammatical sense, [that is,] the remaining *nobiles*’ (Goffart 1980, 181).⁴¹ According to him, *HL* 2.32 meant that surviving Roman landowners were henceforth made tributary (a term that does not necessarily translate as pejoratively as ‘bondsmen’, but might mean having resulted in some loss of status),⁴² and a part of their taxes was redirected to support the Lombards. *HL* 3.16 would represent a second phase: in 584, the system described in *HL* 2.32 received a major modification to accommodate the monarchy. Henceforth, the public resources available were divided equally between the dukes and the king, while the Roman landholders were forced to relinquish the ‘burdened people’, which Goffart understood as ‘the settled, hereditarily burdened slaves and *coloni* of the late Roman world’ (Goffart 1980, 187).⁴³

⁴¹ The question of the grammar was already pointed out in Villari 1901, 244, followed by Everett 2003, 73.

⁴² For a comparative study of the contemporary use of *tributarius*, see Pohl 1997a, 118–21.

⁴³ Goffart’s reading of the settlement of the Lombards has been acknowledged, even if cautiously and rather unenthusiastically; see, for example, Jarnut 1982, 49; Christie 1991, 105–06; 1995, 83. Pohl’s extensive work on the subject brought the theory to a more general acceptance, and eventually even Italian scholarship, especially invested in a violent rupture, brokered a compromise that acknowledged some level of negotiation in the process and the preservation of free status for part of the Roman population, see for example, Everett 2003, 72–79; Wickham 2005, 115–17, see also, Delogu 2004, cf., 1980, 2001.

More recently, Walter Pohl rightly questioned how much this reading fits into Goffart’s own ‘accommodation theory’: Lombard Italy was the only instance in which Goffart envisioned a large-scale transference of property (even if in terms of workforce), a process he had rightly dismissed throughout his book. Pohl also questioned the viability of the model, which would require the Roman landholders to pay a heavy tax while deprived of their workforce. He also

emphasized that, for Goffart's explanation to work, one must take for granted that the Roman estates involved were already organized thoroughly as bipartite estates, which although possible is far from certain (Pohl 1997a, 115; 2001, 192, cf. Goffart 2008, 182–83, with nn. 53–54). Pohl suggested instead that *populi adgravati* should be understood as the population submitted to taxation, and thus 3.16 would refer to the same process mentioned in 2.32, namely, the distribution of taxes of the Romans to the Lombards (Pohl 1997a, 117–22; 2001, 197–200).⁴⁴ The different descriptions in Paul would be grounded on an ideological support (by Paul or by his source) to the Lombard monarchy, presented as an organizing and pacifying force. If the process changed at all, it would only be in the amount of violence involved (Pohl 1997a, 121–22; 2001, 200–01).

It is possible here to take Pohl's solution a step further, suggesting that the two entries might come from different sources: while 2.32 may have come from the 'consular source', Paul likely found 3.16 in the court-sponsored 'chronicle source II' (see pp. 108–12). Thus, according to the interpretation elaborated by Goffart and adjusted by Pohl, the Lombards were 'accommodated' not by expropriating the Roman landowners, but instead by receiving allotments from the global tax, which was henceforth earmarked for the support of the army. In *HL* 2.32 and 3.16, Paul describes the details of the implementation of the system: the surviving Roman aristocracy (which Paul calls 'nobles') was divided between the Lombard 'guests' and turned into taxpayers. In the process, there was no confiscation of property, nor were nobles reduced to serfs. The inconsistency of treatment between *HL* 2.32 and 3.16 come from Paul's source, which combined a source skeptical of the Lombards (which, as suggested above, stressed the damages they caused), with a court history supporting the recently established monarchy.

⁴⁴ For the suggestion that the *populi adgravati* refers to the those burdened by taxes, see Thibault 1904 (see Everett 2003, 75, n. 99). The idea that 2.32 and 3.16 refers to the same process was suggested in the first place, to my knowledge, in Hegel 1964 [1847], vol. 1, 353. Delogu suggested recently it speaks of the same process, but describes a progressive dependence of the Romans, see Delogu 2004, 95–97.

There is good circumstantial evidence to support the continuation of the tax system in Italy after the Gothic Wars (535–54), and the Lombards would have had to be actively inimical to taxation to simply let it disappear completely (Pohl 2001, 189, 201; Wickham 2005, 116–17; Gasparri 2011, 75). Whether this taxation burdened the 'remainder of the nobles' or the 'remainder of the Romans', the resulting system redirected taxes (most likely from agricultural

production) towards the Lombards, preserving the previous distribution of property, ownership, and social status. Additional evidence for such use of taxation comes from a neglected passage in Rothari's *Edict*. As shown in [Chapter 4](#), in the mid-seventh century, Rothari was concerned to protect the patrimony connected to military service, and for that he banned pledging of properties that were, arguably, necessary for the soldiers to perform their military obligations (*Rot* 249, 250, 252; see pp. 171–72). Among items such as horses and pigs, Rothari forbade creditors from confiscating a *casa ordinata tributaria* (*Rot* 252). This cryptic expression appears twice in the Lombard laws (*Rot* 252 and *Liut* 59.vi) but is nowhere defined. It has been suggested that the *casa tributaria* was a 'casa sottoposta a tributo', which implied the obligation of the tenant to provide a specific quota of products (Gasparri 1992, 71 with n. 116; Delogu 1980, 74).⁴⁵ 'Ordinare', however, probably has the legal sense of 'establish', 'create as'—cognate to 'ordain'—and the best reading is probably 'holdings *classified* as tributary'. Considering the context of the laws on *pigneratio*, it is possible that these *casae* were units of production whose tax output was reserved to support specific soldiers, which may trace back to the process of 'accommodation'. By the mid-seventh century, these properties were considered part of the patrimony of the household but were still earmarked for their role in providing for the army.

In 568, among the demands of the rebelling army (if at all similar to other uprisings in the period), the major issues concerned the regular payment of wages and/or access to more stable sources of income (see pp. 31–34). Once the rebelling soldiers assumed control of the cities in northern Italy, they replaced the centralized cash payment in force with a system of local collection of taxes, known to them not only from their own experience in the imperial army but also from the previous organization of the region under the Goths.⁴⁶ To allow for the transition, it was necessary to reorganize the system of collection and distribution of the available surplus, which would then dictate the disposition of the troops. Thus, the rebels were probably broken down in smaller regiments and divided through the Po Valley. These small regiments are probably the original meaning of *fara*, a word loaded with historiographical dissent.⁴⁷ *Fara* was possibly equivalent to terms such as *numerus*, *bandus* or *θεμα* in the eastern army of the same time—John Haldon (1979, 31–32) has remarked on the appearance of such new terminologies for the army in the sixth and seventh centuries, suggesting they reflect deep changes in the organization of the army, and might represent 'the adoption of everyday soldiers' terms in official parlance'. These small detachments were distributed according to the capacity of each *ciuitas* (understood here as the

administrative region including the *urbs* and the attached countryside) to support them,⁴⁸ which arguably explains the widespread use of *fara* as a component of toponyms. That reorganization would explain in part the strong connection of the Lombards with the *ciuitates*, as well as the later evidence for city-based armies.⁴⁹

- 45 Beyerle translates it as ‘ausgestattetes Zinbauerhaus’, 1962, vol. 1, 55 cf. Drew’s ‘holding owning tributes’, 1973, 102.
- 46 For the older *annona* and requisition system of the late empire, see Jones 1964a, 626–30 (*annona*), 672–75 (requisitions); Kaegi 1982; Haldon 1984, 133, and n. 111; 1997, 221–22. For the continuation of the *annona* under the Goths, see Cass. *Var.* 2.5, 3.41–42, 4.13, 5.10–11, 13, 23, 12.5. The Goths were likely settled under some version of the ‘accommodation model’, and so the system would have been familiar in Northern Italy; the main source is Cass. *Var.* 1.26.2–3 (but cf. Agath. *Hist.* 1.6); see Goffart 1980, 92–93; Halsall 2007, 443–45, for a combination of taxes and distribution of land, see; Heather 1996, 242; 2003, 113. For the organization of properties in northern Italy, see Ruggini 1961, 406–510; 1964, esp. 284. Both Procopius and Agathias refer to Gothic properties as concentrated in northern Italy, see Proc. *Bella* 8.35; Agath. *Hist.* 1.6. The Gothic lands in Italy were, arguably, returned to the imperial fisc after their defeat; see; Stein 1949, vol. 2, 612, following Hartmann 1897b, 356ff., 395, n. 14; 1965, 75, 165.
- 47 The best account of *fara* is still Murray 1983, 89–97, who cautiously links it etymologically to *farān*, *fahren*, in the sense of an expedition, especially for the earlier evidence; in that, he follows Bognetti 1967a, with reservations.
- 48 A comparison could be made with the post-Yarmouk Byzantine army, which also saw a similar transition from central to local logistics, being divided in regiment-size *bandus* or *θέμα*: the same process of atomization may be behind the creation of what Western sources (and place names call) *fara*. The major difference between the process in the East and what happened in Italy is that, in the East, the central power in Constantinople dictated (or at least managed) the adjustments, while in Italy the central commander—Alboin, and later Cleph—was in control of a comparatively localized system. For the thematic system, see, esp. Haldon 1979, 28–40, but also, 1977, esp. 171ff.; 1997, 244–51; 1993; see also, Lillie 1977, esp. 12ff. The origin of the thematic system is also an extensive historiographic debate; Haldon 1993 is a good introduction.
- 49 *Contra* Schneider, who suggested the Lombards were settled as *limitanei*, see Schneider 1914, cf. Tabacco 1966, 3–36; Brown 1984, 101–04. For the urban nature of the Lombard kingdom, see Ward-Perkins 1984; Christie 2006. For city-based armies, the evidence comes from *CDL* 1.50 (a. 730), which mentions an *exercitus senensis*.

Even though the process most likely started under Alboin, the extent to which he was able to negotiate within individual localities is open to question, and it is likely that a large role was played by local commanders (*duces*).⁵⁰ The exact nature of the process depends on the balance of power between Alboin and the dukes at the moment of settlement, upon which one can merely speculate, but which likely differed from region to region. In any case, it could be suggested that the Lombards, under their regiments’ leaders, were ascribed to

taxpayers in specific regions in the Po Valley. Local authorities oversaw the process either by their own choice or by royal instruction, with the possible involvement of civilian officers—the forebears of the *gastaldii* in seventh-century documentation. The soldiers acquired a trustworthy source of income, while the taxpayers, now free from the other forms of taxation, were probably paying significantly fewer taxes than before.⁵¹ The arrangement favored both parts and, although the Lombards, unlike the Ostrogoths, had no Liberius to be praised for it (nor a Cassiodorus to praise him), it should have kept the soldiers satisfied and well supplied while causing minimal stress to the population.⁵²

Economic woes and the breakdown of taxation

The central question about this model is how to conciliate its implementation with the lack of evidence for taxation in seventh-century sources. If the system of direct tax transference had been kept in place into the seventh century, evidence of it would most likely have survived, especially in Rothari's *Edict* (643), but it did not (Gasparri 2004, 34–42; Wickham 2005, 117). Effectively, the society presented in the *Edict* is one of small-scale landholders and not of public funded military officers. Thus, it stands to reason that at some point between the settlement and the publication of the *Edict*, taxes were phased out, raising the question of how the military was henceforth supported and how military personnel dealt with the transition.

⁵⁰ Pohl 1997a, 121 places the dukes in the center of the process based on the dating suggested by *HL* 2.32, a dating that is certainly unreliable.

⁵¹ The numbers can be hypothetical at best. Contemporary complaints against high taxations are common; see, for example, Proc. *Bella* 7.1.28–33; *LP*, Vita Iohannis III 63,3; Greg. *Reg.* 2.28, 5.38. Using the tax data from *P. Ital* 2, Jones has suggested that the tax levied from Church property would be around 57 percent, and that would exclude *superindicta*, *extraordinaria* and *munera sordida*; the weight on the simple tenant would be significantly heavier; see Jones 1964a, 821; Wickham 1984, 10–12; Pohl 2001, 201ff. For a different reading of *P. Ital.* 2, see Tjäder 1954, vol. 1, 181, following Hartmann 1965, 169. If Paul's passage can be trusted—and that question should not be taken lightly—the Lombards would levy a third in taxes. Though the numbers are uncertain, the order of magnitude is probably correct, given the gradual simplification of the state and the consequent reduction of its costs; see Wickham 2005, 84ff.; Pohl 2013, 283–84. Another piece of evidence for the reduced amount of taxes under the Lombards is Gregory the Great's reports on how the weight of the taxes kept pushing new regions of Italy towards the Lombards; see, for example, Greg. *Reg.* 5.38. For the role of taxes in Italian economic decline, see Brown 1984, 7–8; Wickham 1984. High taxes as central to the end of the empire are one of the

main arguments in Jones 1972, esp. 1593–94, see also, 1964b, 1964a, 1038ff., but notice the sensible toning down of the issue in Whittaker 1980.

- 52 For the praise of Liberius, who coordinated the settlement of the Goths in Italy, see Cass. *Var.* 2.16.5.

Even though there is no hard evidence for the demise of taxation in the late sixth century, there is enough evidence for the state of the economy. From that perspective, it becomes quite clear what complications the tax-based accommodation faced. Even though the Gothic Wars (535–54) indeed provided the final blow to Italian economy, the peninsula had been in a downward spiral since the breakdown of the exchange networks in the Mediterranean in the fifth century.⁵³ The limited prosperity observed during the Ostrogothic period did little to address the structural problems of the economy, such as the shortage of manpower, the excessive taxation, and the low productivity. ‘Theodoric’s only economic achievement’, adds Thomas Brown, ‘was to stave off such a crisis by his utilization of Gothic manpower for defense and by the order which his strong rule created’ (Brown 1984, 6). Several decades of political instability, foreign aggression, weather disasters, and disease followed, leaving the Italian economy in shambles. The picture after the war is one of economic disarray and agricultural decline, worsened by the recurring epidemics and climatic upheavals; the palliative measures issued by imperial authorities after the defeat of the Goths could hardly have had any effect.⁵⁴ In 553, when the Franks moved down into northern Italy, Procopius says they found the country utterly deserted, which might not be a complete exaggeration (*Bella* 8.24.4–11, 25–29). In the 560s, rebellions (Sinduald in 565 and the Lombards in 568) confounded any hope of recovery.

The impoverished, debt-ridden countryside was, arguably, unable to keep up with the tax requirements in the accommodation system devised for the Lombards, and the collection of taxes soon started to lag behind. Once the wealth that could be looted from the cities was consumed, and once the booty captured during the rebellion was spent, the Lombard soldiers probably found themselves wanting. After five years of struggles, the central authority had failed to provide for the army the promised security, and that failure cost the lives of Alboin and Cleph. Henceforth, local leaders had to find new strategies to support their men: the solution was either to raid nearby communities—and the sources attest Lombard raids in Gaul and south of the Po—or to find employment in the empire. The rebels were free from the empire, but the battle for survival had just started.

- 53 For the state of late sixth-century Italy, I follow closely the summaries in Everett 2003, 15–19; Brown 1984, 4–8; Marazzi 1998; Wickham 2000, 2005,

esp. 115–20; Ward-Perkins 1984; Jones 1964b, 1972. More generally on early medieval economy, see now Hodges and Bowden 1998; McCormick 2001; Horden and Purcell 2000; Wickham 2005; Davis and McCormick 2008.

- 54 On the state of the economy: *Pragmatica Sanctio*, *CJC* III, app. vii, 799–802; and *Lex quae data est pro debitoribus*, *CJC* III, app. viii, 802–3, cf. Agn. c. 95, Pelagius, *Epp* 4.85. Famine: Proc. *Bella* 6.2.20–21 (for 543); Greg. *Dial* 3.37 (589/90); and in the early seventh century: *LP*, Vita Sabiniani, 67.1; the big flood of 589: Greg. *Dial* 3.19, 4.37; Greg. *Hist* 10.1 (s.a. 590). On the impact of the crisis on the economy, see Stein 1949, 605–11; Ruggini 1961, 5–6; Jones 1969, 67–68; Guillou 1969, 89–94; Brown 1984, 6; Everett 2003, 16–17. For the impact of the plague on Italy and the rest of the empire, see Stein 1949, vol. 2, 756–61; Teall 1965, 315–16; Le Goff and Biraben 1969; Patlagean 1977, 88–92; Allen 1979; Leven 1987; Biraben 1989; McCormick 1998; Sarris 2002, more recently, see Stathakopoulos 2004; Horden 2005; Palme 2007, and the papers collected in Little 2007; Some scholars have attempted to minimize the impact of the plague; the most radical example is Durliat 1989, but, for a more moderate view, see Whitby 1995, 95–97.

3 The battle for Italy

Cleph's death marked the end of the first phase of the Lombard rebellion. A time of uncertainties followed. The thrust for centralization had been shortlived. The Lombards, disconnected from a Mediterranean-wide imperial supply chain and facing the collapse of the Italian economy, struggled to support themselves. The burden to guarantee survival shifted to local commanders who could provide some measure of security to the troops. These leaders are the *duces* of the sources, translated here as 'dukes'. The title should not mislead. The term was used rather in connection to *ducere*, to lead, meaning 'leader', than to an official position, and even less a title of nobility, as it became in later periods. Some of these leaders had supposedly held the office of duke in the imperial army, and managed to maintain their commanding roles in the rebellion; others were likely new men, who seized the opportunity for a place of command.¹ In the following decade, the Lombards lived by the sword; for hire when contractors were available, for loot when they were not. Ten years of raids took their toll on the former '568 army', and by the early 580s, as this chapter shows, the Lombard soldiers gradually sought to retire, and yearned for some stability. This generational shift set the tone for the military capacity of the Lombards. At the same time, the future of Italy was being decided between the two powers who formerly controlled the region, the emperors in Constantinople and the Merovingian kings in Metz. This chapter deals with the diplomatic and military interplay between Byzantines and Franks for the control of northern Italy, and with the struggle of the Lombards, caught in the crossfire.

¹ The historiography on Lombard dukes is vast. For Lombard dukes as a continuation of the Roman dukes, see Fustel de Coulange 1888, 241–42; Hartmann 1897b, 38–40, see also, Hartmann 1926, 197; Andrich 1910, 338–39, 362–64, more recently, Brühl 1968, 364. Some scholars prefer to see the dukes as created anew and dependent on the kings (relying especially on *HL* 2.9): see Gasparri 1978; Barnwell 1997, 109–22. For the origins of the argument, one has to go back to Savigny 1834, vol. 1, 280ff.; Bethmann-Hollweg 1846, 62; the argument was reinstated in Pabst 1862, 411–16. In addition to that, some scholars support a 'Germanic' origin for the dukes, which can be divided

between an older ‘democratic’ and more recent ‘aristocratic’ interpretation, depending on whether the dukes are seen as representatives of smaller blocks of the free Lombard population, or as heads of aristocratic households. For representatives of the ‘democratic’ reading, see Hegel 1964 [1847], 453–54; Schmidt 1969 [1941], 59, 591–92, 614–15; Schupfer 1863, 262–308, esp. 275; Hodgkin 1885, vol. 5, 183–84; Brunner 1961, vol. 1, 122, for ‘aristocratic turn’, see Mitteis 1948, 9–11; Schlesinger 1956, esp. 247. This aristocratic reading was mostly preserved in the ‘ethnogenesis’ model, see Wenskus 1961, 486; Jarnut 1982, 27–29, but also in Christie 1995, 113–15.

The *interregnum* and the recreation of the monarchy

Paul had limited sources on the *interregnum* and the elevation of Authari. The ‘consular source’, to which Paul had access, seems to have ended with Cleph’s death and the ‘accommodation’ of the Lombards, and likely did not cover the chaos that followed. The idea of the ‘rule of dukes’ as a period of its own was, naturally, conceived only after the monarchy had been reestablished, and the period could be retroactively understood as an intermission. In the mid-seventh-century sources, however, this rupture was erased, at least in the official records (pp. 152–53). This development in the representation of the past, which happened first under Agilulf and then under Rothari, is discussed in the next chapters. Here, it is enough to say that the information on ‘rule of dukes’ comes from a single source, the ‘chronicle source II’, produced under Agilulf as a continuation of the ‘consular source’ (108–12). It was conceived by the monarchy to bridge the two periods of monarchical rule, highlighting the benefits of the new system. This new interpretation rewrote the ‘rule of dukes’ not as a rupture but as an *interregnum*, making Authari the son of Cleph.² This vision also closely connected the creation of the Lombard monarchy and strong ties with the Franks; this link plays a major role in this chapter (although Paul kept it to a minimum). This text was likely the source for Fredegar and the *CH* (cf. Fredegar, 4.50 and *CH* 1523). Although Paul had access to the ‘chronicle source II’, he relied more on later, royally inspired historiography, notably the narratives produced under Rothari, which survived in the prologue of Rothari’s *Edict* and the *Origo gentis Langobardorum*.

Recombining these sources, Paul the Deacon presents the collapse of the monarchy as a tragedy, leading to the bad times under the rule of dukes; good times returned only with the restoration of the kings (Cammarosano 2001; Delogu 2009; Gasparri 2017). Paul’s support of strong rulers should be seen in the context of the then ongoing Frankish occupation, whose all-powerful king, Charlemagne, had commissioned the *HL*, amongst other things, to contend for the need

for a royal supervision over the ducal powers in the south (Goffart 1988, 333–47; McKitterick 2004, 66–69; Fabbro forthcoming, 2020). Thus, the *HL* presents kings as an essential component of nations and connects other forms of government with disorder and corruption. For instance, the definite sign a nation had ceased to be, for Paul, was when they could no longer afford a king (e.g., *HL* 1.20, 1.27). The absence of a king also led to violence, as Paul described happening after the death of Cleph, ‘in the *seventh year* after Alboin came to Italy’ (*HL* 2.32, emphasis added). A brief comparison with Paul’s source, Gregory of Tours, reveals his agenda (and his flexibility in the use of sources): in Gregory, the devastations are ascribed to *seven years* under Alboin (*Hist.* 4.41, emphasis added). Conversely, to adopt a king was natural. Early on, the Lombards ‘not wanting to be under dukes, established a king over them after the fashion of other nations’ (*HL* 1.14.) In similar terms, after the *interregnum* the consensus of the Lombards decided to raise Cleph’s son as king, inaugurating an age Paul describes as admirable (*mirabile*) (*HL* 3.16). In both passages, the context and phrasing are borrowed directly from the Bible, notably the institution of kings after the abuses of the judges in 1 Sam. 8. Paul’s narrative for the reestablishment of the monarchy under Authari borrows the narrative: the iniquity of the dukes is replaced by the wise rule of the kings. It is Carolingian propaganda finely dressed up in biblical rhetoric.

- 2 See, for example, the royal list in *Rot. Prol.* Scholars have consistently accepted this later attribution of paternity: see Schmidt 1969 [1941], 597; Schneider 1972, 24, 26; Delogu 1980, 24–25; Jarnut 1982, 36; Verhoeve 2007, 2–3.

To deliver this narrative, Paul steered clear of two important factors he might have found in his sources: first, he omitted that many Lombard dukes opposed the restoration of the monarchy, dukes who had found a profitable *modus vivendi* without a central power (Delogu 2004, 106), and second, the substantial role of the Franks in promoting and sponsoring the Lombard kings. This chapter addresses those issues.

Interregnum?

The period usually called *interregnum* was part, and to certain extent a result, of a large geopolitical adjustment in the Po Valley, which became, even if momentarily, the ‘hub of world politics’ (Goubert 1951a, 13). Until Justinian’s intervention, the former western half of the empire had been divided into three major areas of influence: Gaul, mostly controlled by the Franks, Italy (including Provence) in the

hands of the Ostrogoths, and the Byzantine East. By breaking down the Ostrogothic power, Justinian reshaped Mediterranean politics, with Provence going to the Franks, and *cispadanian* Italy and Illyricum (together with north Africa) going back to the empire. Northern Italy remained a point of contention, shifting hands from Franks to Byzantines during the war, eventually falling into Alboin's hand in 569.³ With the assassination of Cleph, however, the Lombards split into small groups, whose main hope for livelihood was in violence, and whose plans fell short of a larger political project. Thus, northern Italy in the 570s resembled other peripheral zones of the empire, exporting military expertise either peacefully as mercenary work or aggressively as raiding parties. One could speak without many reservations of a 'Balkanization' of northern Italy, in the sense that the region henceforth resembled the contemporary Danubian space and the Balkans (for which, see pp. 24–25).

- 3 For the Frankish invasion, Agathias, 1.5–6; Greg. *st Hist.* 3.32; Greg. *Hist.* 4.9); for the Byzantine final victory, see Agathias, 1.18–20; Agn. c. 79; Agathias, 2.1.1–5, 2.2–9 (destiny of the Frankish army); for the end of Frankish control of Venetias: Mar. Av. s.a. 555.4, 556.5 (but cf. Agn. c. 90, who dates the final expulsion of the Franks to 565); Greg. *Dial.* 1.2; LP *Iohannes III*, 63.2. For the Franks in northern Italy, see Löhlein 1932, 49–53; Stein 1949, 605–62; Büttner 1960, 64–69; Ewig 1983, 18–25; Evans 1996, 179–81.

Franks and Byzantines, nonetheless, kept their interest in Italy, either to harvest the military potential of the Lombards to their profit or, if not, at least to prevent Lombard raids into their territories. Their approaches and immediate goal varied. The empire's policy depended on finding a balance between two apparently contradictory demands. Constantinople trod carefully to maintain a balance in the region that would reduce Lombard raids without compromising their military value. There was surely the desire to pacify Italy, especially the *cispadanian* territories still tightly connected to Constantinople (Marazzi 1998), but there was also a high demand for military manpower the Lombards could supply. On the other side of the Alps, each of the Frankish *Teilreichen* had different exposures to the Alpine border and different concerns about its passes, and thus sponsored different policies for Italy (see [Map 2](#)).⁴ Guntram's Burgundy bordered the Alps, meaning it had direct access to the Po Valley, should there be need to intervene, but it was also exposed to any instability on the southern side of the Alps, which could easily spill into Burgundian territory. Unlike Guntram, the Austrasian king Childebert had little concern about Lombard raids, since any spillover from Italy was absorbed instead by the Bavarians, in a buffer duchy between the central Alpine passages and the Austrasian provinces. The sixth-

century Bavarians are poorly known, but the evidence points to some sort of Merovingian (mostly Austrasian) ascendancy over their dukes.⁵ The Austrasian interest in Italy stemmed not from border security but instead from a claim of sovereignty over the Po Valley, which the court in Metz derived from Theudebert's conquests in the 550s (Collins 1983). The Austrasians, who saw themselves heirs to Theudebert's kingdom, considered thus northern Italy a zone of influence to be regained and maintained (see Greg. *Hist.* 4.22, *Ep. Aust.* 20).

- 4 The territorial identity of the various Merovingian partitions employed here is anachronistic, and it would be more correct to speak of the 'kingdom of Paris (Charibert), Soissons (Chilperic), Rheims (Sigibert), and Orleans (Guntram)'—it is nonetheless a useful anachronism, simplifying on the text a rather overloaded description of political forces (i.e., the combination of the royal court and the aristocratic groups, often taking antagonistic stances, incorporated within the king's territorial domains). Additionally, the division of the kingdom sketched here is clearly oversimplified, and the partitions, based on *civitates*, were only in part contiguous territories. For example, Sigibert also held cities in the south, including a large area around Clermont, and some other *civitates* on the Mediterranean coast, while Charibert control Grenoble, deep into Burgundian (Guntram's) territory; for a detailed account of the partition, see Widdowson 2009, with reservations. The precise details are not especially relevant here. For the partition, and the Merovingian tradition of dividing the kingdom, still fundamental is Ewig 1976a. For the general context: Esders 2016, see also Wood 1994b, 88–102; Wood 2003, and more specifically, 2006, 64–65, 71–72; Van Dam 2005, esp. 199–205.
- 5 Much has been made of the role of the Bavarian dukes in Lombard affairs, especially due to the importance of Theudelinda (e.g., Bognetti 1966–68, 160–61). The information on the Bavarians is in much worse condition than that which is available for the Lombards, and most of what we know before the eighth century comes from Paul the Deacon. It is likely that the population in Bavaria, as the Alamanni and the Thuringians, were part of the larger sphere of influence exerted by the Merovingian kingdom, most likely by the directly adjacent Austrasia. Here, I mostly followed Wood's view of the Bavarians as part of a broader Merovingian area of influence, see Wood 1998, esp. 238–43. On a more traditional view, see Reindel 1975, esp. 101–17; Wolfram 1985; Fritze 1994, 76; Wolfram et al. 1990; Hammer 2007, and more recently, Steuer, Hines and Fries-Knoblach 2014. See, however, the strong criticism on the Bavarian 'ethnogenesis' theory in Bowlus 2002, esp. 249–56.

Guntram was the first of the major players to come to an arrangement with the Lombards. Between 569 and 574, the Lombards raided Burgundy in search of loot.⁶ The dates, number, and details of these incursions are uncertain, but the attacks Marius witnessed from the frontline in Avenches suggest a significant amount of damage was caused to the Alpine regions in Gaul, a point on which Gregory of Tours agreed. According to Gregory, the invasions were also responsible for the death of one of Guntram's senior military officers,

Amatus, who was killed in action (Greg. *Hist.* 4.42). Initially, the Lombards found the southeastern border of Burgundy to be easy prey, with Guntram engaged elsewhere. The king's primary concern was then to the north, and the threat of the alliance between Chilperic and Sigibert, which seemed to be aimed at him.⁷ Thus, the Burgundian army was deployed to counter incursions either from the north or the west, but certainly not from the southeast. To deter the Lombard raids, Guntram was forced to direct his attention to the Alpine border to buckle up the defense; the command was given to Mummolus, who had replaced Amatus (Greg. *Hist.* 4.42).⁸ Although the details are lost, the rearrangement of the region was clearly successful, and all sources agree that after the first attacks the Franks put up a stiffer resistance (cf. Christie 1995, 80–83).

- 6 Gregory of Tours describes three incursions, one successful (*Hist.* 4.42, undisclosed location) and two stopped by Mummolus (*Hist.* 4.42 towards Embrun, France, dep. Hautes-Alpes, 4.44 a three-pronged attack commanded by Amo, Zabau, and Rodan, towards Arles, Valence, and Avignon). The three events seem to be in close succession, but it is worth noticing that the earlier books of the *Histories* are not as chronologically precise as the later ones (Murray 2016, 66–68); Marius of Avenches describes only two, five years apart: Mar. Av. s.a. 569.2 (in neighboring regions of Gaul [*finitima loca Galliarum*]), 574.2 (capturing the *clusae*, and bivouacking in St. Moritz Switzerland, kan. Graubünden); the *CH* 1523 (one incursion resulting in a tragic defeat, led by Zafan in the Rhone river, not far from St. Moritz). For the context, see Goubert 1951a, 22–26; Pohl 1993, 292; 1997a, 99–102; Christie 1995, 86ff.
- 7 The evidence for an alliance between Chilperic and Sigibert comes from the dual negotiation of brides (the royal sisters, Galswinth and Brunhild) with the Visigothic king Athanagild, around 568. The alliance came to an end with the death of Galswinth; Fredegar seems to preserve some evidence of a campaign involving Sigibert and Chilperic against Guntram, but the chronology is unreliable; on the alliance, see Esders 2016, 437–38.
- 8 I see no relation between Guntram placing Mummolus at the border to counter Lombard incursion, and the renewed relations between Justin II and Sigibert, as suggested in Widdowson 2009, followed by Esders 2014, 35.

By late 574, Mummolus had stabilized the border. The pacification came, however, at a high cost: as long as the Lombards remained a threat, Guntram's troops were pinned down guarding the passes, curtailing his capacity to intervene elsewhere. If he were to confront the remaining Merovingian kings, Guntram needed to stabilize northern Italy. According to Fredegar, after the defeat of the last incursion, Guntram imposed terms of a truce, which included control of the Italian side of the two main passes in the western Alps: Susa, in the valley of that name, and Aosta, on the Great St. Bernard Pass (Fred. 4.45). There is no further evidence of this negotiation, but a letter sent by pope Pelagius II to the bishop of Auxerre, Aunacharius,

in October 580 attests good terms between Lombards and Franks. In the letter, the pope pleads to the Frankish bishop to convince ‘your kings’ to ‘hurry to separate themselves from the hostilities of the Lombards, that unspeakable enemy, and from allying with them’ (*Ep. Mer. Col.* 9, 449). The letter establishes the *terminus ante quem* for the truce. It should also be noted that Fredegar’s negotiations mention only Guntram (but mentions *both* Guntram and Childebert in further negotiations, see p. 80). while the pope referred to kings plural, suggesting that Guntram alone was behind the truce but by 580 the Austrasian court had been included in some capacity. That suggests that negotiations started during a time the two courts were not on good terms, but were amended afterwards. The turning point was probably the Treaty of Stone Bridge (577), when Guntram adopted Childebert and made him his heir (Greg. *Hist.* 5.17 [s.a. 577]). Thus, the evidence points to a truce between Guntram and the Lombards, agreed upon after the end of hostilities in 574 and before 580 (Pelagius II’s letter), in which the Lombards surrendered Susa and Aosta, suggesting the intention was to protect the king’s southeastern flank. Before 580, the Austrasians acknowledged the deal, possibly as part of the Treaty of Stone Bridge in 577.

On good terms with Guntram, the Lombards redirected their raids south, and *Cispadainian* Italy was set on fire. In 576, as a response to the increasing raids, Justin II (565–78) sent an army under Baduarius, which was, however, soundly defeated (Joh. Bic. s.a. 576.1). With Frankish connivance and unchecked by the Byzantines, the Lombard dukes plundered across the Po (*LP. Vita Benedicti*, 64.1; Joh. Bicl. s.a. 578.3; Isid. *Chr. Mai.* 404^a). By the early 580s, the depredations of the Lombards were widespread. In 581, when Pelagius II was elected, news of his appointment could not be sent to Constantinople for approval because the Lombards were sieging Rome (*LP. Vita Pelagii*, 65.1). Terrified, the *Cispadanian* Italians sought help from Constantinople. Menander recalled two embassies sent to Tiberius II (578–82) to procure military help (*Frg.* 22 and 24). In both cases, the delegation failed to prompt a military intervention: the empire was committed to the eastern theater and would not engage in the West. In the first case, however, Tiberius sent a significant amount of money (3,000 pounds of gold, or 216,000 *solidi*) and suggested it be used to bribe the Lombards to join the empire, or, if they refused, to hire some of the Frankish chieftains (τινας τῶν Φραγγικῶν ἡγεμονῶν) to wear down and wipe out their power (*Frg.* 22). The second embassy guaranteed a small military detachment, and further suggestions to try to win over some of the Lombards with gifts (which many of the Lombards accepted); the Frankish option seems to have been scratched at this point (*Frg.* 24).

It is hard to believe Tiberius would have willfully allowed civilians to link up with the Frankish kings and bring an occupation army into Italy without any imperial military supervision, especially after the long fight the Byzantines had endured expelling the Franks from there only a few decades before. Even harder is to believe Tiberius would be so naïve as to think that, once the Lombards had been destroyed, the Franks would leave. What Tiberius seems to have been trying to accomplish in Italy was adding an element of protection to the imperial cities south of the Po, even if that meant provoking further Frankish incursion to the north. Note that both embassies were sent from Rome, at this point still distant from the frontline, but exposed instead to raids. Tiberius's money—as well as his small military detachment—was intended to hire swords to provide internal security, either by coopting some of the Lombards to counter raiding parties, or to bring in Frankish mercenaries to harass the Lombards from the north to reduce their incursions across the Po: as Menander puts it, to 'wear down' the Lombards (*Frg.* 22). If the fragments are in the right chronological order (which one can only speculate), offering money to the Lombards turned out to be effective enough and, as the emperor was instructing the second embassy, he dropped the idea of hiring the Franks altogether.

In fact, Tiberius had good reasons to keep the Lombards around, and the lack of imperial resources should be taken with a grain of salt. The emperor was disingenuous when he claimed that the empire had no resources to destroy the Lombards, even with the imperial forces committed elsewhere. The Persian wars had not prevented Justin from sending an army in 576, and, even though Tiberius was unwilling to relocate more troops, he sent the first delegation back home with enough money to raise a respectable army in the Balkans—which were by then relatively calm.⁹ What conditioned imperial policy was likely not the lack of resources but the expectation that the situation in Italy could be reversed without sacrificing the Lombards. Tiberius's intention as he advocated (and bankrolled) bribery was not to pay the Lombards *away* but to bribe them *in*. The emperor counted on relying on their muscle to buff up the imperial army. This intention is made clear in 581, when the emperor negotiated with the Lombards for military support in a massive operation to encircle the Avars in Pannonia—the plan included a Lombard attack from the west to support the main imperial thrust from the east.¹⁰ The attack never happened (although it was tried again a few years later, see pp. 102–03). but it comes to show that Tiberius's policy in Italy was more nuanced than Menander lets out. A full-fledged military action was not attempted because it risked compromising the supply of Lombard troops, then in higher demand since the war with Persia had resumed

in 572 (Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 135–66; Lilie 2003, 69–74; Sarris 2011, 232–36). The empire betted that the offer of gold and the threat of a Frankish invasion could get the unwilling Lombards back in line in time to use them against the Avars or the Persians. And the bet indeed paid off: both Justin and Tiberius were able to use Lombard mercenaries repeatedly in Syria and in the Balkans (e.g., Evagr. 5.14 [209.27–210.2]; Theo. Sim. 2.17.9 [Balkans], 1.9.7–8 [Syria]; Joh. Eph. 6.13, 6.30, 32). The strategy succeeded, however, at the cost of Italy, where the ‘tearful war’ (*lacrimabile bellum*) raged on (Joh. Bic. s.a. 578.3).

- 9 Following Jones’s equivalence of 72 *solidi* per pound; see Jones 1964a, xv; Goffart (2012, 18) seems to be off, converting the 3,000 pounds to 426,000 *solidi*. At the rates of the later empire (i.e., six *solidi* per year to pay and equip), that amount could raise 36,000 soldiers; for the rate, see Elton 1996, 123. In comparison, Justinian’s peace with the Persians in 532 included a subsidy to the Persians, supposedly to buttress the defense of the Caucasian passes, in the amount of 11,000 pounds of gold, see Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 96–97; Sarris 2011, 144–45.
- 10 Joh. Eph. 6.30, 32 the commander in chief for the expedition, Narses (not the one who invited the Lombards into Italy: *PLRE*, ‘Narses 4’, 930–31) died on the way and, in the end, the Lombards never came.

Tiberius’s obfuscating diplomacy notwithstanding, *Cispadanian* Italians went ahead to procure local solutions to bolster their security. The emperor had indeed instructed them to buy their safety by bribing Lombards and Franks, and some evidence suggests that was exactly what they did. That seems to be the context of an odd letter preserved in the *Epistolae Austrasicae* (*Ep. Aust.*), the *Ep. Aust.* 48.¹¹ The letter was sent to a certain *dux* Grasulf (most likely the Lombard duke in Friuli) by the Austrasian aristocrat Gogo (the *nutritor* of the infant king Childebert II).¹² Unfortunately, the transmission of text did not favor clarity and the context is just as cryptic. For what the text does reveal, the letter brings a snapshot of communications involving four parts, two present, the Austrasian court and a local commander, Grasulf, and two absent, the *pontifex* (most likely, but not certainly, the pope), and the imperial court. In substance, Gogo was replying to a suggestion, coming from a relative of Grasulf in the Austrasian court (*Biliulfo parenti vestro*), of a ‘very necessary and useful enterprise for both sides’ (*rem necessariam valde partibus opportunam*), which should be confirmed ‘for the sake of curtailing the obstinacy of the invaders’ (*pro resecanda contumacia infestantium*). Grasulf seems to be looking for a confirmation of whatever he was offered to join the imperial forces, which certainly has to do with the cash (*summa integra pecuniarum*) that should, if Grasulf were to accept, be destined for ‘the battle’ (*certamine*). The deal Grasulf is referring to seems to have been first

negotiated by the *pontifex*; Grasulf was unsure this actor could speak for the emperor (*si in vos vigor pontificii non consistit*). Gogo mentions that an imperial embassy was expected in Francia and that he would mediate the negotiations if needed and would guarantee the Franks were willing to join in to avenge the crimes against the ‘Romans’.

- 11 Goffart (1957) has suggested reading this letter as a sign of an earlier alliance between Franks and Byzantines against the Lombards, mostly redating to the early 570s and linking to a peace treaty between Sigibert and Justin II (Greg. *Hist.* 4.40), a dating neither discarded nor reinstated in Goffart 2012, 18, n. 60, but strongly dismissed in Ewig 1983, 31 n. 118; Malaspina 2001, 219, n. 926, rediscovered, however, in Esders 2014, 35–40. Indeed, the court in Metz restored good relations with the empire under Justin II, probably at some point in the late 560s, in a negotiation that might have involved, as Esders has correctly suggested, the fragment of the True Cross entrusted to Radegund, and perhaps also political decisions involving the reorganization of the kingdom after the death of Charibert; see, 2014, 33–37. I see no evidence, however, that it resulted in a diplomatic reshuffle that would see the Franks, the erstwhile invaders, turned into partners against the Lombards in Italy (only a few years after offering the Lombard king a Frankish princess for a wife); *contra* Esders 2014, 35–36.
- 12 Thus 581 provides the *terminus ante quem* for the letter; below, I opt for late 580 or early 581 (p. 53, n. 25). For the dating, see Malaspina 2001, 219, n. 926. Some scholars argue for a *terminus post quem* of 575, the beginning of the rule of the minor Childebert with Gogo as his *nutritor*, but Goffart has questioned the assumption that Gogo would not be the signer of a royal letter while a mature king was around, and set the date for 571, connected to the embassy reported in Greg. *Hist.* 4.40, the last embassy before 581 (Goffart 1957, 77–80). Ewig (1983, 28, n. 111, 31, n. 118) dismisses Goffart’s emphasis on tracing the embassy as an *argumentum e silentio*, and dates the letter to January or February 580.

This initiative was nothing but what Tiberius had suggested, and the money offered to Grasulf may have come out of the 3,000 pounds of gold sent back to Italy. It is tempting to suggest that the *pontifex* behind the offer was indeed pope Pelagius II, who came to power in 579 in the midst of a Lombard raid around Rome (*LP*, Vita Pelagii II, 65.1). Given that no rescue came from Constantinople, the pope sought help locally, as Tiberius had suggested, bribing Lombards and Franks. One of Pelagius’s letters to the Franks indeed survived, in which the pope reproaches the Franks for allying with the Lombards and pleads for help (*Ep. Mer. Col.* 9; see p. 72). He may have also contacted, as instructed, a few Lombard commanders, offering money; Grasulf may have been one of them. Thus, later that year (580), Grasulf, having been offered money to turn against the Lombards, reached out to Childebert to figure out what to do with the papal offer. Note that the ‘*summa integra pecuniarum*’ is not referred to as a future payment for Grasulf’s decision, but instead, an existing budget

Gogo suggests could be used if Grasulf commits to battle. When Grasulf sent Biliulf to Francia, the money had already been offered and might have even changed hands. There is no information on how the negotiation proceeded. Given that no joint campaign took place and that Grasulf was still unaligned in 590 (*Ep. Aust.* 41, see pp. 119–20 Pelagius’s plan probably amounted to nothing. Indeed, in 584 Pelagius II was again pleading to the imperial government for help (*Ep. Pelagii Gregorio Diacono in MGH Ep.* 2, App. II, 440–41). In Italy, the ‘tearful war’ went on.

The French connection: the creation of the Lombard monarchy

The involvement of the Austrasian court with Grasulf signals some level of cooperation between the Franks and the emperor to act against the Lombards in Italy. There is, however, no clear evidence that it marked the beginning of a long-lasting cooperation against the Lombards, as some scholars have suggested (Goffart 1957, 77–82; Ewig 1983, 31; Loseby 2016, 487–90). There are other possible reasons why Grasulf deferred to the court in Metz for advice. As suggested above, by 580 there was a truce in force between the Lombards (that is, some dukes in the Po Valley) and Guntram, a truce that actually also included the Austrasians (pp. 79–81). Grasulf was probably uncertain how turning against the Burgundian king, with whom Childebert was friendly, could affect his position. By fall 580, however, the situation in Gaul had changed, and a group was plotting to turn the tables in Austrasia, reverting the alliance with Guntram. This group has been labeled the ‘aristocratic group’ and, in major lines, favored good relations with Chilperic at Guntram’s expense. This realignment culminated in the Treaty of Nogent (581), which made Chilperic Chilperic’s heir (*Greg. Hist.* 6.3 [s.a. 581]).¹³ The man negotiating with Grasulf, the *nutritor* Gogo, was not a member of this new group (Dumézil 2007, esp. 559–61), but he may have sensed the change of the tide, especially after the death of Chilperic’s only heir (*Greg. Hist.* 6.3 [s.a. 581]). Gogo hurried the negotiations, possibly intending a combined campaign in the summer of 581, as a concession to the ‘aristocratic group’.¹⁴ But there was no Italian campaign in 581 and Grasulf did not join the ranks of the empire then; in Francia Gogo was removed from power by a ‘palace coup’ early in 581; he died shortly after (*Greg. Hist.* 6.1 [s.a. 581]).¹⁵

This exchange between Gogo and Grasulf highlights the fragility of Guntram’s settlement with the Lombards. The political fragmentation in Italy made the kind of diplomatic solution Guntram was attempting

hard to implement since there was no binding force to assure general assent. If Grasulf could plot with Metz, what could assure Guntram other local dukes would not pursue their own political agenda? The treaty Guntram had been able to exact in the 570s was meaningless without a centralized authority to vouch for it. The palace coup in Austrasia in 580–81, which revived the antagonism between Austrasia and Burgundy (Greg. *Hist.* 6.3 [s.a. 581]), made the security of southeastern borders again a top priority (Ewig 1976a, 140–41; 1983, 31–32, and more recently; Esders 2016, 442). Once in power, this group coordinated a strike against Guntram that combined inviting to Gaul the Byzantine-sponsored pretender Gundovald, and an invasion of Guntram's northern territories (Greg. *Hist.* 6.1, 3, 11, 12, 19, 22, 24, 27; Ewig 1976a, 141; Esders 2016, 442). In 582, Gundovald was moving in Gaul against Guntram and, early in the following year, the Neustrian Chilperic was marching against Guntram's city of Bourges with the support of Austrasian troops (Greg. *Hist.* 6.31 [s.a. 583]). It was only a military rebellion in the Austrasian camp, which brought back to power the segments of the Austrasian aristocracy that favored Guntram, that prevented a complete encirclement of the Burgundian forces (Greg. *Hist.* 6.31; see Ewig 1976a, 141; 1983, 36–37; Esders 2016, 442). The threats to the north and west made it paramount to Guntram to pacify his southeastern border, so that he could use the full weight of his resources in the case that the endemic *bellum civile* came again to a full-fledged conflagration.

- 13 And they also agreed on the plot to invite in Gundovald, an illegitimate son of Chlothar, to replace Guntram, see pp. 85–86.
- 14 Gogo wants Grasulf 'celeriter confirmare' their negotiation, and that it takes 'nulla mora', *Ep. Aust.* 48.
- 15 Two fundamental events might be behind this political shift: Ewig (1983, 31–32) favored the death of Chilperic's son Clovis, leaving him without an heir; while Esders (2016, 442) stresses the death of Gogo, but see also Ewig 1976a. 141. After this change of policy, elements from the opposing group shifted from Austrasia to Burgundy, namely, Lupus and Dynamius; see Greg. *Hist.* 6.11 (s.a. 581).

It is tempting to suggest that at this point Guntram started to meddle with the loose Lombard political arrangement to produce conditions for a generally acknowledged peace. A passage in Fredegar indeed suggests so. According to him, after the truce in 574, each of the twelve Lombard dukes chose an envoy, and sent an embassy to the emperor Maurice, asking for peace. At the same time, they sent a similar embassy to Guntram and Childebert, pleading for peace and protection in exchange for an annual tribute of 12,000 *solidi*—as a pledge, they also offered Guntram the Valley of Lanzo (*vallem*

cuinomento Ametegis). After that, still according to Fredegar, they placed themselves entirely under Frankish authority (*patrocinium*), and then, ‘without delay’ (*nec mora*), after Guntram and Childebert granted their assent, the Lombards elected Authari king (a. 584) (Fred. 4.45). The story has been dismissed since it contradicts Paul the Deacon (*HL*, 3.16), who sees the process springing from the internal motivation of the dukes: Fredegar would offer too Frankish an account of Italian history.¹⁶ Dismissing Fredegar—or Gregory, for that matter—for putative (and somewhat anachronistic) nationalistic inclinations adds little to the debate. The question should not be how ‘Frankish’ Fredegar’s report is, but whether his concatenation of events fits the chronology for the period or whether the story should be dismissed as ‘embellishment and confusion’, to borrow Hartmann’s words (1897a, 81, n. 4).

- 16 Most scholars have either ignored the passage, or simply dismissed the passage as either a fabrication or a legend, see, for example, Hartmann 1897b; Schmidt 1969 [1941], 602. The skepticism towards the passage stems, especially in German scholarship, from Pabst’s (1862, 417–18) refutation. Pabst found unlikely a connection between Franks and Lombards in light of the Austrasian policy in Italy, failing, however, to account for the fact that Guntram and Childebert could (and more often than not did) espouse different policies. Mor (1933) has long suggested the passage was valid, but referred instead to a negotiation with the dukes—Delogu (1980, 24–25) takes it a step further and suggests the submission of some of the Lombard dukes to the Franks was a sign of the lack of national feeling.

There are a number of reasons to accept Fredegar’s account. Although Fredegar adds a different layer to the story, his account of a pro-Lombard Guntram does not necessarily contradict the contemporary report from Gregory, who indeed stresses Guntram’s opposition to the Austrasian campaigns in Italy in the 580s, and hints that the relationship between Guntram and the Lombards might have been more cordial than he lets on (e.g., Greg. *Hist.* 9.20 [s.a. 588], 9.28 [s.a. 589]). Similar evidence comes from the correspondence between pope Pelagius II to Aunacharius mentioned above (p. 75). Although Fredegar differs from Gregory by favoring tribute and cooperation (Wood 1994b, 168), his account does not contradict the contemporary evidence.

Nonetheless, Fredegar’s narrative needs to be clarified (see [Table 3.1](#)). His timeline is not immediately apparent, mostly because his focus was *not* on the events of the 580s, but instead on how the Lombards stopped paying the aforementioned tribute under Chlothar II (Fred. 4.45). Fredegar seems to have telescoped two events into one narrative: the first event is the truce that followed the Lombard raids in the 570s, concluded between 575 and 580 (pp. 71–72). The second

event happened several years later, and consisted of new negotiations leading to the acknowledgment of Frankish sovereignty, the promise of tribute, and finally the re-creation of the monarchy under Authari (ca. 584). This arrangement did not happen until Maurice, also mentioned in the passage, was emperor, that is to say, 582 at earliest (and 602 at the latest). Since Fredegar states that the treaty was negotiated with Guntram *and* Childebert, it happened during a period when the two kings agreed on foreign policy. As mentioned above, the relationship between Guntram and Childebert reached an all-time low with the Treaty of Nogent in 581. It was only in 583 that a military uprising removed the aristocratic clique, opening the way to improve the relations with Guntram (Greg. *Hist.* 6.31 [s.a 583]). The new government was associated with the king's mother, Brunhild, and with the old guard connected with the late Cogo. At the same time, the good relations Metz had with Spain, another point of contention with Guntram, turned sour, as the queen's son-in-law, the Visigothic prince Hermengild, recently converted to Catholicism, was defeated by his father, the Arian Leuvegild (*Hist.* 5.38 [s.a. 580], 6.43 [s.a. 584]).¹⁷ Both scenarios favored realignment with Guntram, on account of the king's long struggle against Chilperic and his ongoing plans to annex Septimania from the Goths (Ewig 1983, 37). By April 584, both the Visigoths and Chilperic were bracing for a combined attack from Childebert and Guntram (*Hist.* 6.40 (s.a 584), 6.41 [s.a. 584]). This arrangement, however, did not last, and, at the latest by fall 584 the aristocratic group was back in power, and the relationship between Guntram and Chilperic was again strained. The turning point was possibly earlier in the year, after the death of Chilperic's infant son left the king once again heirless (*Hist.* 6.34–35 [s.a. 584]). The news enticed the Austrasians to court a restoration of the terms of Nogent, which had made Childebert Chilperic's heir. Although '[t]his switchover from one court faction was not instantaneous', as Goffart (2012, 9) rightly remarked, the new alignment was in full swing by October. It is safe to suggest that this new alignment was behind Childebert's choice to invade Italy (instead of Spain) on the summer 584 (see pp. 89ff.). a course of action Guntram consistently opposed in the years to come.¹⁸ In sum, between the elevation of Maurice (in 582) and that of Authari (at some point around 584), there was just one period in which the two courts were on good terms, namely from 583 to mid-584. Thus, the second Lombard embassy in Fredegar, which counted on cooperation between the two kings, had a limited window, after the military rebellion of 583 and before mid-584: once Guntram was back on the offensive and in the good graces of the Austrasian court, and, in all likelihood, before the Austrasian Italian campaign in the summer.¹⁹ Table 3.1, below, presents Fredegar's

passage set to a firm timeline.

Table 3.1 Sequence of Fred. 4.45 with Dates

574	Defeat of the Lombards in Burgundy
574–80	Ceding of Susa and Aoasta to Guntram
575–80	Inclusion of Childebert (most likely as a result of the Treaty of Stone Bridge, 577)
580	Pelagius II's letter attests good relations between both kings and the Lombard
Post 582, but before 584	Lombards send envoys to Maurice, Guntram and Childebert (most likely between 583—mid-584)
Post 582–84	Promise of tribute and transference of the Valley of Lanzo to Guntram
584	Authari chosen as king

The evidence in Fredegar can be thus explained: while on good terms with Austrasia, Guntram got involved in Lombard internal politics to support the centralization under a king, with the goal to further stabilize Italy, a policy not dissimilar from Roman precedents. Patently, nineteenth-century scholarship saw the establishment of a king as a positive step towards building the modern state, a bias still widespread amongst scholars.²⁰ Consequently, historians have taken the reestablishment of kingship as a Lombard initiative to improve efficiency in the face of renewed threats (Bognetti 1966–68, 164–65; Wickham 1981, 32; Jarnut 1982, 38–39; Christie 1995, 86; Pohl 1997a, 102). Examples of late Antique foreign policy, however, hardly support the idea. The Romans had for a long time craftily created and maintained kings amongst the barbarian peoples across the *limes*; their intent was certainly not to make them into more formidable enemies. Kings were stabilizing elements, standing as guarantors of contracts and agreements. The Romans found it much easier to come to terms with a central command than to negotiate with every single local chieftain; Guntram would too. If their puppet kings failed to keep their followers under control, the Romans could punish or replace them, usually an easier task than a full-fledged assault (Schörner 2011). Following this tradition, Guntram arguably supported the Lombard dukes who favored monarchy.

¹⁷ Hermangild's rebellion was a much more complex affair than Gregory lets out, lasting from 578 to 583/4, see Collins 2016.

¹⁸ Already suggested in Goffart 2012, 10, n 33. For Guntram and the Italian campaigns, see Greg. *Hist.* 9.20 (s.a. 588), 9.29 (s.a. 589).

¹⁹ That chronology also fits the order of events suggested by Paul, *HL* 3.16–17, who also suggests Authari was chosen as king *before* the Frankish campaign in the summer 584.

²⁰ See Collins's remarks on the fetish of centralization in 2010, 163–64. Pabst's

original refutation of Fredegar is the perfect example: he considered that for Guntram and Childebert to allow a king for the Lombards would strengthen them and thus make no sense for the Franks, see Pabst 1862, 417–18.

Thus, according to Fredegar, the Lombards elected duke Authari as their king, ‘by *permission* of Guntram and Childebert’ (emphasis added), and promised to pay tribute (Fred, 4.45). Contemporary sources are silent about Authari’s background. One can only speculate whether he was simply one of the Lombard dukes negotiating with the Franks or whether he had a role of leadership amongst his peers before his elevation.²¹ None of the contemporary sources attest to the relationship between Cleph and Authari, and Paul the Deacon’s claim that Authari was the son of Cleph should be dismissed—it springs from a mid-seventh century tradition, connected to a historiographical movement under Rothari (see pp. 152–53).

The centralization of the Lombards under a king completed the process of incorporating the Po Valley into Guntram’s sphere of influence—an impressive diplomatic achievement, especially obtaining Austrasian assent. From being the victim of Lombard incursions in 569–74, Guntram became a stout defender of the Lombard monarchy: henceforth he not only consistently strove to dissuade Frankish campaigns in Italy but also provided a back door for Lombard diplomatic missions to Austrasia (Greg. *Hist.* 9.20 [s.a. 588], 9.29 [s.a. 589]).

²¹ That could explain Joh. Bic. s.a. 581.1, where the author places the election of Authari to 581. It might just be a wrong date.

Schrödinger’s dukes

The monarchy that Paul saw collapse under Charlemagne in 774 was a century-old institution, and for him its reestablishment under Authari seemed natural. Contemporary sources, however, reveal a period of confusing political allegiances, when dukes held on to their freedom to negotiate their level of commitment to a new king or the emperor, and some of this material found its way into the *HL*. If Fredegar is to be trusted, Guntram negotiated with envoys from twelve dukes— independent of how accurate this number is, it is impossible to know exactly who they were or how representative of the rest of the Lombards.²² Fredegar indeed mentions unwilling dukes, who did not welcome the return of the monarchy: once Guntram allowed the establishment of a king, ‘a duke, also named Authari, and his entire division went over to the emperor, and remained on his side’ (Fred. 4.45). This Authari is actually a known character, who served in the

imperial ranks until the 590s, when he eventually joined another rebellion, this time in the south. He plays an important role in [Chapter 4](#) (Greg. *Reg.* 2.45, *PLRE*, Auctarit and Autharius 1 [likely the same person], vol. 3b, 150, 158, see p. 116).

The reluctant Authari was not alone. Droctulf was another Lombard duke to change sides at this time (*PLRE*, Droctulf 1, vol. 3b, 425–26). His tombstone’s inscription in Ravenna was preserved in the *HL* and was most likely the only source Paul had for the duke.²³

DROCTULF’S EPITAPH (*HL* 3.19)

Drocton lies buried in this tomb, but in body only,
For in his merits he lives on before the whole world.
He was one of the [Lango]Bardi, but by birth he was Suavian,
And suave he was to all people.

- 22 The other reference we have for the number of dukes comes from Paul’s *HL* 2.32, where Paul mention 36 dukes (or 35, depending on the MS). The number seems unrealistic.
- 23 Paul’s dependency on the inscription is evident, and all he added was a reference to king Authari (*HL* 3.18), as already suggested by Waitz in his edition of *HL*, *MGH SRL*, 102, n. 1; see also Weise 1887; Schmidt 1969 [1941], 602, n. 3, Boggetti 1966c, 461–63. It has been suggested that most of Paul’s narrative should be dismissed on account of that; see Waitz’s comments in his edition of the text, in *MGH SRL*, p. 102, n. 1; see also, 1969 [1941]; Weise 1887, Boggetti 1966c, 461–63. Boggetti suggested that Droctulf’s change of side should not be related to the siege of Brescello and that he probably went to the Byzantine with the troops that abandoned the Lombards after the death of Alboin (see Ch. 2). There is no support for such reading. More recently, both Jarnut (1972, 349) and Gasparri (1978, 54–55) consider Brescello one of Droctulf’s actions when already a Byzantine commander, similar to the one in Classis, also mentioned on the epitaph.

Terrifying in countenance, but kind at heart,
His beard was long over a vigorous breast.
This man, loving the standards of Rome and the Republic,
Became himself a destroyer of his own people.
He despised his dear relatives, while he loved us,
Deeming Ravenna his own home.
His first glory was the capture of Brescello.
There he remained, dreadful to all of his foes.
When this mighty general brought aid to the Roman standards,
Christ first bestowed on him the banner of command
And when Faroald withheld Classis by treachery,
He prepared forces by sea to take the city
Battling in tiny ships on the flowing currents of the Badrinus,
He himself conquered numberless bands of [Lango]Bardi.

Again he vanquished in Eastern lands the Avar,
Seeking to win victory's sovereign palm for his lords.
Sustained by the aid of the martyr Vitalis,
He often came to them as a conqueror, rejoicing with triumphs.
He asked to rest on the church of St. Vitalis.
He had this burial place prepared for after his death
Dying, he implored these things of the bishop Iohannis,
By whose pious love he had returned to these lands.

This epitaph, together with a few other references in contemporary sources, allows for some information on Droctulf's career. Suabian (Suavian) by birth, he took control of Brescello, possibly controlling rebel troops in the early 570s²⁴—‘one of the Bardi’, as the epitaph claims. Droctulf was perhaps one of the many recruits that Narses brought to Italy, who rebelled with Alboin and joined the ‘Lombards’. He eventually (re)joined ranks with the empire, together with the city he controlled. (Paul is most likely wrong about Authari recapturing Brescello [*HL* 3.18], which was abandoned by the Byzantine only in 602 [*HL* 4.28].)²⁵ Fighting for the empire, Droctulf expelled the rebel Faroald from Classis (who probably held the city in terms similar to those in which Droctulf had held Brescello), fought in the Balkans in 587 against the Avars (Theo. Sim. 2.17), and was finally sent to Africa in 598, carrying a reference letter from none other than pope Gregory I (Greg. Reg. 9.2 [Sept.–Oct. 598]). He died at an unknown date and was buried in Ravenna. Droctulf's timeline suggests he, together with other military commanders, remained independent after the death of Cleph, finally choosing sides in the late 580s (but certainly before 587) when he joined the imperial ranks. The reestablishment of the monarchy in 584 might have driven him to finally pick a side.²⁶

²⁴ *contra* Gasparri (1978, 54), who thinks Droctulf conquered Brescello from the Lombards after he changed sides.

²⁵ The source here is the ‘chronicle source II’, the event dated to September 13th, 602, see pp. 108–12).

²⁶ *contra* Gasparri (1978, 54), who suggests that the duke changed sides on account of the Frankish invasion. Admittedly, based on *HL* 3.18, the sole primary source for that, both readings are possible.

Other local commanders changed side within the decade: a few years after Droctulf, the dukes of Reggio, Piacenza, and Parma surrendered to Romanus and negotiated their way back into the empire during the 590 Byzantine campaign in northern Italy: the then exarch reports that when he marched up on the Po, ‘the Lombard dukes established in those cities rushed with all celerity to meet us in Mantua and to surrender to the holy Republic’. They were received

back into Byzantine service, not without first surrendering hostages (*Ep. Aust.* 41; see pp. 103ff.). Shortly after, Gisulf, the son of the Friulian duke Grasulf, also turned to the Byzantines. The land north of the river was also not consistently on Authari's side. Based on Agilulf's wars to subdue the dukes in the 590s, it is probable that Bergamo and Treviso (*HL* 4.3), then eventually Verona (*HL* 4.13) and Trento (*HL* 4.27), also resisted accepting the new king (see [Chapter 4](#)).

The creation of the monarchy forced the military commanders in Italy to pick sides. Like Schrödinger's famous cat, while the political conditions of Italy remained a closed box it was possible for local strongmen to be both Lombard dukes and imperial contractors. Once there was a Lombard king demanding allegiance, it was no longer possible to do so. When the monarchy was reestablished, it became a political force that demanded either affiliation or opposition—this push for a clear allegiance became even more evident in 590 when the empire marched again into northern Italy (pp. 102ff.). In the next decade, independent dukes were squeezed out one by one, either by the Lombard king or by the imperial forces. These local commanders were unable to resist the pressure of the newly founded kingship, and eventually were either incorporated into the Lombard kingdom or surrendered to Byzantium to be relocated elsewhere.

Under pressure

The summer of 584 marks a new transition in the rapport between Lombards and Franks. It was a change not only in the tone of the interactions, which shifted from the peaceful contacts between 575 and 584, but also of the main player, whose role was taken by the Austrasian court, with Guntram being relegated to mediation. From the summer of 584 on, the Austrasians invaded Italy almost every other summer. This shift to more active foreign policy was not new for the Austrasian court, which had sponsored a number of expeditionary forces in the recent past, but it was indeed a break from Sigibert's (d.575) policy of favoring internal affairs (Büttner 1960, 69; Ewig 1983, 27). This section deals with the invasions of 584, 585, and 588—the 590 campaign resulted from a different context and is covered in the next section. Scholars have ascribed all these campaigns to Byzantine subsidies given to Childebert to remove the Lombards from Italy.²⁷ This interpretation fails to account for Austrasian interests in Italy while overestimating the capacity of Constantinople to pressure the Frankish kings. This section dismantles this reading and suggests a new interpretation.

In broad strokes, the traditional interpretation suggests that the Byzantine government, fully committed elsewhere and lacking the

resources to deal with the Lombards, hired the Franks to attack northern Italy, and thus get rid of the ‘Lombard problem’. The subsidy consisted of 50,000 *solidi*, paid to the Austrasians at some point before 584. At the same time, to deal with Guntram’s opposition, the empire set in motion a plot to replace the king with the more pliant Gundovald. When neither of these schemes produced a successful Frankish invasion, Maurice, it is thought, leveraged a royal hostage, Athanagild, the grandson of Brunhild, as a means of compelling Childebert to attack.²⁸ And this is how Maurice would have succeeded in dragging the Austrasians into four different but equally unsuccessful Italian campaigns. Pressured by the money he received, or trying to rescue Athanagild, Childebert is thought to have invaded Italy in 584, 585, 588, and 590, but always halfheartedly, and always retreating without ‘liberating’ it from the Lombards. The contemporary evidence, however, does not fully support this narrative.

Byzantine bribery and blackmail: a review of the evidence

Scholars have argued for two leverages available to Maurice in the 580s, namely, bribery and blackmail. The idea that Maurice bribed the Franks to destroy the Lombards, sending a substantial subsidy to Childebert at some point before 584, finds support in Gregory of Tours. The bishop mentions in a few places that the emperor held Childebert responsible for a campaign against the Lombard, towards which he had paid 50,000 *solidi* ‘a few years before’ 584 (Greg. *Hist.* 6.42 [s.a. 584]).²⁹ Dissatisfied with the results of the first campaign (584), the emperor sent an embassy asking for his money back. A similar delegation, Gregory claims, was behind the 585 campaign (*Hist.* 8.18 [s.a. 585]). In addition to Gregory, a letter in the *Epistolae Austrasicae* (*Ep. Aust.* 42) seems to refer to the payment: the correspondence Maurice sent to Childebert, probably on September 584 (or 585), makes no reference to an invasion of Italy but talks openly about the ‘promises’ (*pollicita*) that the king had made in writing but failed to fulfill.³⁰ Finally, John of Biclarum reports for 584 that Maurice moved the Franks into Italy ‘per conductelam’, which is generally accepted as ‘by hire’ (Joh. Bicl. s.a. 584.4).³¹

²⁷ Goffart 1957, 111–18 (and more recently, Goffart 2012, 14–15); Löhlein 1932, 53–74; Büttner 1960, 76–80; Delogu 1980, 23–28; Jarnut 1982, 38–39, and more recently, Heuclin 2014, 276–78; Loseby 2016, 490–92. Wickham is skeptical, 1981, 32–33.

- 28 Athanagild was Childebert's nephew, the son Childebert's sister Ingund and Hermangild, the heir to the Visigothic Leovigild. Athanagild was transferred, together with his mother Ingund, to Byzantine protection after Hermangild's rebellion was defeated by his father.
- 29 Gregory mentions the money was paid 'ante hos annos', which had generated an unusually long historiographical debate on when the money was paid, especially since by then Maurice was not emperor for long; see Goffart 1957, 100–02, 110–12, and again in Goffart 2012, 12–19; Ewig 1983, 37–38; Loseby 2016, 490–91.
- 30 *Ep. Aust.* 42 is dated to September 1st, but without a year: Malaspina dates it to 585, based on the admittedly corrupted final line, but several different dates have been suggested; for a review of the scholarship, see Malaspina 2001, 203, n. 808. I adopted here September 1st 584, meaning the letter left Constantinople in early September, *arriving* in Gaul after the first Italian campaign and before the one in 585, connected to the imperial embassy in Greg. *Hist.* 8.18 (s.a. 585), but referenced before in 6.42 (s.a. 584), in which I follow Goubert 1951a, 106–07.
- 31 See, for example, Goffart 1957, 110; 'Conductela' is an unusual term. Apart from this passage, it was used in the *Cod. Theod.* (4.13.1), there, in the sense of 'conducting', 'taking care'. For John, it is probably related to *conductus*, mercenary, meaning 'Maurice brought the Franks to Italy by a mercenary contract'. The fact that John places this campaign in 584 does not mean much: John describes two Frankish campaigns against Lombards, one in 584 and the other in 587 (with the help of the Byzantines). There was no campaign in 587, which probably refers to 590 (which indeed counted with Imperial troops), and the one he mentions in 584 may refer to 584, 585 or 588, or all of them together. His mention that the invasion caused damage to 'both peoples' suggests it more likely refers to 585, the one clear draw.

The question of Byzantine money bankrolling the Italian campaigns is more complicated than it first appears, and is entangled with the Byzantine support for pretender Gundovald. The intricacies of the so-called 'Gundovald Affair' go beyond the scope of this book, but a few details are necessary to understand the interaction between Maurice, Childebert, and the 50,000 *solidi* earmarked for an Italian campaign.³² Gundovald was an alleged son of Chlothar I (d.561) who, repudiated by the Merovingian kings in the 550s, fled first to Italy and eventually to Constantinople. Thence he returned to Gaul in 582 to claim his inheritance, packing a substantial treasure. Soon after landing, however, the Austrasian commander Guntram Boso turned on him and seized his treasure; Gundovald escaped to an island in the Mediterranean (Greg. *Hist.* 6.24 [s.a. 582]). He was back in Gaul in early 584, a return Goffart has connected with the death of the then sole heir to Chilperic. Gaining support from the ex-Burgundian commander Mummolus and the Neustrians Desiderius and Bladast, he was proclaimed king in Brives (*Hist.* 7.10, 28 ([s.a. 584])). However, once the news that Chilperic indeed left an heir (and that the Neustrian aristocracy was supporting him) spread (*Hist.* 7.7, 19 [s.a. 584]), Gundovald started losing supporters. By early 585, Guntram

was able to rally his forces and put him down (defections: *Hist.* 7.34 [Desiderius], 7.37 [Bladast]; defeat: 7.34, 37, 38, 39 [s.a. 585]).

32 For the ‘Gundovald Affair’, I am following closely Goffart’s reassessment of the event in Goffart 2012. The episode has generated considerable scholarship and different interpretations; see Goubert 1951a, 29–70; Goffart 1957; Ewig 1983, 35–36, 40; 1988, 45–48; Bachrach 1994; Zuckerman 1998; Dumézil 2008, 258–69; Widdowson 2008.

The intimate details of the ‘Gundovald Affair’ will never be fully known, mostly because the key source, Gregory of Tours, not only might have been unaware of some aspects of the plot but was also reticent to share the schemes he did know. In broad strokes, the last few scholarly attempts to crack down on the affair suggest that the motivation behind the plot came from Francia, from an aristocratic clique coming from all the three courts, among which figured some of the most significant military commanders of the period, such as Mummolus, Guntram Boso, and Desiderius (Wood 1994b, 95–96; Goffart 2012, esp. 25–26). These men were troubled by the current crop of Merovingian kings, namely the anti-militaristic Guntram and the infant Childebert, and believed new blood could bring back the old-style military leadership for which they longed. Based on a plan (in all likelihood) put together by Guntram Boso in 581 or 582,³³ they contacted the emperor for support, in the form of both a viable Merovingian candidate, Gundovald (who was then in Constantinople), and money to fund the expedition. To sway imperial support, the plan included a proposal for an Italian campaign. The then emperor Tiberius received the Austrasian initiative positively, possibly trusting that Gundovald would establish a pro-Byzantine government in Gaul favorable to the imperial agenda for Italy. Goffart is probably right to suggest the emperor ignored the details of how that plan would be implemented (Goffart 2012, 19; Zuckerman 1998, 11–12, cf. Dumézil 2008, 261–62). The money then was sent either in one payment, through Gundovald, as Goffart claims, or in two separate installments, the first supporting Gundovald, the second coming to Childebert for the Italian campaign.³⁴ In any case, it is safe to assume the minor Childebert had no knowledge of the entire deal, and, if he was debriefed about the money at all, he was told it was a subsidy for the Italian campaign—that is indeed the information Gregory reports as the king’s understanding (*Greg. Hist.* 6.42 and 8.18). Maurice, coming to power in 582, knew a significant sum had been shipped to Austrasia to bring about a government friendly to Constantinople (and willing to harass the Lombards), but, as Tiberius, was likely unclear about the details (Goffart 2012, 18–19).³⁵

As to what concerned Italy and the Austrasian court, there was a

sum of money sent by the emperor to support a change in Frankish policy in favor of a pro-Byzantine agenda. Some people, such as Guntram Boso, knew all the details of the negotiation, which included putting Gundovald on the throne; others, such as (likely) the young king Childebert, knew a redacted version, which merely connected the money with Italy. As argued below, that was certainly not enough to guide foreign policy, as Childebert's dismissive attitude towards the emperor confirms (Greg. *Hist.* 6.42 [s.a. 584]).

33 The plan comes to light in 584: Greg. *Hist.* 6.24, 26. (s.a. 584).

34 Goffart 1957, 100–01, 110–12; 2012, 12–17, countered in Ewig 1983, 37–38; Zuckerman 1998, 12, n. 37; Loseby 2016, 488, n. 103.

35 Maurice was invested in trimming the expenses inherited from Tiberius, and inquiring about the results of previous investments fits well into what is known of the first years of his rule (Whitby 2001b, 99–100).

Maurice's second means of leverage, the royal hostage in Constantinople, is also attested in the sources, albeit indirectly. Brunhild married her daughter Ingund to the Visigothic prince Hermangild in 580 (Greg. *Hist.* 5.38 [s.a. 580]), who subsequently rebelled against his father and was executed. Before being captured, he sent his wife and son (the infant Athanagild) to the care of the Byzantine authorities in Spain *Hist.* 5.38, 6.18 [s.a. 582], 6.40 [s.a. 584], 8.28 [s.a. 585]; for the context, Gillett 2010, 129–32). From there, they were sent to Africa and finally to Constantinople, where only Athanagild arrived, Ingund having died on the way (*Hist.* 8.18, 8.28 [s.a. 586]). Gregory mentions the captivity of Ingund as a rumor just before Childebert's decision to once again attack Italy (*Hist.* 8.18). Later on, Gregory reports that Brunhild pleaded in front of the Austrasian nobles to help her daughter, thought at that point to still be alive and in Africa (*Hist.* 8.21 [s.a. 585]). In addition to Gregory, there are two groups of letters in the *Epistolae Austrasicae* (corresponding to two embassies)³⁶ that mention Athanagild, the first one dated to the end of 585 (*Ep. Aust.* 43, 44, 45 and 47; Goubert 1951a, 117–22, followed by Malaspina 2001, 217, n. 911) and the second one dated to the end of 587 (*Ep. Aust.* 25–39; Goubert 1951a, 127–59, 166–71; Malaspina 2001, 165, n. 573).

A significant amount of speculation is necessary to produce a blackmail campaign out of this material. None of the sources openly states that Maurice was holding Athanagild captive to get Childebert to honor his promise to destroy the Lombards.³⁷ The only evidence for linking the exiled prince and the Italian campaign is extrapolated from Gregory of Tours:

- 36 The best description of the late sixth-century Frankish embassies in connection to the *Ep. Aust.* is still Goubert 1951a, 95–178, broadly followed here. On the letters related to Athanagild, Gillett 2010.
- 37 *Contra* Goffart 1957, 112; Ewig 1983, 44; Loseby 2016, 491–92. Notice, however, the language: for Ewig, [*a*]uscheinend (apparently) Maurice wanted military cooperation in exchange for Athanagild, for Goffart, ‘[i]t might be supposed’; only Loseby sounds more confident: ‘These covering letters [i.e., *Ep. Aust.* 25–39] are not so crude either to link the two issues or reveal the substance of the negotiations, but it is surely no coincidence that the Austrasians were galvanized into renewed action in Italy.’

Childebert, compelled by imperial envoys demanding the gold given the year before, sent the army into Italy. There was a rumor then that his sister had already been transferred to Constantinople. But since the commanders [of the army] fought against each other, they returned without gaining any profit

(Greg. *Hist.* 8.18)

The connection between the two segments, the imperial envoys pushing for the Italian campaign and Ingund, is unclear. Scholars have assumed that Gregory, by mentioning the exiled sister, implied that Maurice was using her captivity to pressure Childebert.³⁸ No other documentation, however, supports the connection between the Italian campaign and the exiled princess (or her son). Ingund and Athanagild were handed over to Hermangild’s Byzantine *allies*, and there is little reason to assume they were captives, even if their presence in court was convenient. It is more likely that Gregory connected the Italian campaign (and Maurice’s demand for Childebert to honor their agreement) with the rumors about Ingund and Athanagild because both came from the same mission of imperial envoys. In any case, Gregory spared only a few words for the news relating to Ingund, which he considered a mere rumor (which turned out to be true, although Ingund had actually died in transit to Constantinople).³⁹ In the fall of 585, Brunhild indeed pleaded to the Austrasian nobles on behalf of Ingund but was turned down (*Hist.* 8.21 [s.a. 585]). Again, nothing in the passage suggests she was pushing for yet another repeat of the Italian campaign—news of the defeat in the summer was still fresh, and the next campaign would wait until 588. Instead, Brunhild’s request should be read in connection with the revenge campaign against Leovigild (responsible for the exile) planned by Brunhild and Guntram earlier in 584, but which the Austrasian aristocracy had scratched late in that year.⁴⁰

As for Athanagild, the court in Metz sent an embassy at the end of 585 or the beginning of the following year, asking for Maurice to send him back. This embassy carried the first bundle of letters related to Athanagild.⁴¹ The letters belonging to this collection, including the

quite touching *Ep. Aust.* 43 and 44, were indeed intended to retrieve the young Athanagild, and were addressed to the recently born son of the emperor (43), to his wife (44), to the patriarch of Constantinople (45), and finally to the emperor (47) (Goubert 1951a, 110–22; Malaspina 2001, 206–12, 217).⁴² They achieved nothing. The heartfelt Austrasian plea and the imperial reticence notwithstanding, there is no evidence in this communication for the idea that Maurice withheld Athanagild to keep him as a bargaining chip against Austrasia. The plans for Athanagild were probably much different. The young prince, who claimed at that point the throne of Spain,⁴³ could prove useful, in particular with the anti-Byzantine Leovigild ruling Spain. Rather than blackmailing Brunhild, Maurice's plans for Athanagild possibly involved a coup in Spain—similar to what was attempted in Gaul with Gundovald.⁴⁴

38 Goubert 1951a, 25; Goffart 1957, 107–17; Ewig 1983, 41–42; Christou 1991, 134–35; Loseby 2016, 490–91, more recently, Goffart has reduced the importance of the hostages in Constantinople, see 2012, 9–10, 18 n. 61.

39 Loseby (2016, 492) wonders why Gregory dismissed the hostage situation so easily, suggesting that 'he chose for whatever reason to suppress [Athanagild's] existence as a factor in Austrasian policy-making'. The question is, if Gregory dismisses it and the *Ep. Aust.*, as Loseby recognizes, only obscurely hint at it, where is the concrete evidence for the blackmail?

40 Plans against Hermangild: *Greg. Hist.* 6.40 (s.a. 584); scratched: *Greg. Hist.* 6.42 (s.a. 584). The Spanish campaign meant realignment with Guntram, who actually invaded the Visigothic Septimania later that year: *Greg. Hist.* 8.30 (s.a. 585).

41 For the embassy, see Goubert 1951a, 110–22, 170–71; Gillett 2010, 138–40. Note that Gillett refers to this group of letters as the 'second package', the first being the second embassy (*Ep. Aust.* 25–39).

42 Gillett (2010, 140–42) has strongly demonstrated that one should not infer too much from the overly emotional tone of the letters.

43 He is later named 'king' in the letter addressed to him: *Ep. Aust.* 27–28.

44 A similar comparison in Goffart 2012, 17.

The second embassy carrying letters related to Athanagild was sent in 587 but with distinctly different goals.⁴⁵ It brought a large number of letters to higher officials in the Constantinopolitan court, among which the emperor (26, 25–27), his wife (29 or 30), his mother (29 or 30), and the patriarch of Constantinople (31). Although many letters mention Athanagild in some capacity (there are even two letters addressed to him, *Ep. Aust.* 27–28), there is no reference to an exchange between the exiled prince and military assistance. The idea that the primary objective of this embassy was to arrange the release of Athanagild relies solely on the supposition that the subject was dealt with in oral instructions, which are indeed referred to in the letters, but whose contents are unknown.⁴⁶ Goubert has, however,

clearly demonstrated that the embassy had nothing to do with the liberation of Athanagild, and aimed instead at fostering the relations between the two courts.⁴⁷ As argued below, this diplomatic rekindling may have been intended to obtain *imperial* military support for an *Austrasian* campaign in Italy, not the other way around (pp. 99–100).

The 584 campaign

Constantinople unquestionably influenced Austrasian policy in the 580s, both as a powerhouse whose interests have to be taken into account and as a shadow agent funding groups of interest within the Merovingian kingdoms—as the ‘Gundovald Affair’ clearly illustrates. Austrasian foreign policy, however, had its own agenda, and was more often than not responding to internal needs and motivations. Byzantine pressure alone cannot explain the strange repeating cycle of invasions followed by peace treaty followed by invasions observed between 584 and 588. The broader context of the three Italian campaigns in the 580s is the struggle for power within Gaul, and the attempt of an aristocratic section in Austrasia, which consistently opposed Guntram, to undermine the balance he had created in Italy with the establishment of the Lombard monarchy.

45 Carrying the letters *Ep. Aust.* 25–39; for this embassy, see Goubert 1951a, 127–59, 170–71. For the letters connected to Athanagild, see Gillett 2010, 136–38.

46 Even though the Frankish letters from 585/586 refer to him as ‘captivus’, ‘orfanus’, and ‘peregrinus’, it fits rhetorically the tone of the letters.

47 Goubert 1951a, 135–37, *contra* Gundlach 1888, 373–74; Hartmann 1897a, 71, still maintained in Goffart 1957, but compare with Goffart 2012, 18 together with n. 61.

It was argued above that the Lombard monarchy was created in late 583 to early 584 through Guntram’s state-building policies, with the approval of the Austrasian court, by then commanded by associates of the mother queen Brunhild (pp. 76–80). Brunhild’s faction, however, did not last long in power. In the summer of 584, the pro-Chilperic (and anti-Guntram) aristocratic faction was back in control in time to send the Austrasian army marching into Italy.⁴⁸ The campaign started by safeguarding access through the central Alps since Guntram controlled the three main western passes (Aosta, Susa, and the recently acquired Valley of Lanzo; see p. 77). Thus, Childebert first took control of the Brenner Pass (north of Trent); he seems to have accomplished this by settling the border disputes with the local duke Euin, who was married to one of the daughters of Garipald, the Frankish duke of Bavaria (*HL* 3.9–10).⁴⁹ Trent eventually served as a

contact point between the Lombards and the Austrasian court (*HL*. 4.1). Then, Childebert marched into Italy. According to Gregory of Tours:

- 48 Traditionally, the shift in Austrasian politics towards Chilperic is dated to after the Italian campaign, which was in turn motivated by Brunhild and her concern to guarantee the safe return of Athanagild, held in Constantinople. The move would have antagonized Guntram and emboldened the aristocratic faction, restoring ‘the regency of the notables’; see Goffart 1957, 113–14, followed by Ewig 1983, 37. In a revamping of his 1957 article, Goffart toned down the importance of the captives in Constantinople (a major mover in 1957). In his new reading, the shift in Austrasian politics is connected to the death of Chilperic’s only heir earlier in 584 (*Greg. Hist.* 6.34–35), which then prompted the Italian invasion in the summer of 584 and the abandonment of the Spanish campaign (*Hist.* 6.42); see Goffart 2012, 9–10; on the relevance of the hostages in Constantinople, 18, n. 61.
- 49 The dating of these clashes is doubtful, and scholars have suggested anything from 568 to 583. There had been attempts to link this with a broader strategy involving Baduarius’s failed campaign in 576 (Christie 1995, 86–90) or as a two rounds wars, with the Frankish victory in 577 and the Lombard comeback in 581–83 (Jarnut 1982, 35); for the dating, see Reindel 1975, 106 (dated to 575); Wood 1998, 242 (568–75); Delogu 1980, 24 (581). I see no reason to see on *HL* 3.9 more than local skirmishes. For the relation between the Bavarians and the Franks, refer to n. 5. Given the state of the sources, one can only speculate on the political objectives of the marriage; it is nonetheless likely that the Bavarians are well within the Frankish political influence at this point. Having said that, Hartmann (1897a, 61) probably summarizes the Bavarian question best: ‘We are so poorly informed about the Frankish-Bavarian relationship at that point that we cannot assess whether [the marriage] was a step to get closer to the Franks or the creation of a Bavarian-Trentine alliance against the powerful neighbor.’

When the Lombards heard of that, afraid to be cut down by his army, they submitted to his power, giving him much wealth and promising to be *faithful and submissive to his side (parte eius)*. Once *he accomplished all he wanted*, the king returned to Gaul (...). Some years before, Childebert had received from emperor Maurice 50,000 *solidi* to drive the Lombards out of Italy. The emperor, hearing that Childebert was allied to them in peace, asked for his money back, but the king, sure of his strength, was not inclined to even respond to the matter.

(*Hist.* 6.42, *emphasis added*)

The imperial embassy to which Gregory refers was the one arriving in Gaul late in the fall of 584, possibly bringing a letter from the emperor, the *Ep. Aust.* 42.50 The letter, dated September 1st, reproached the king for failing to live up to his promises of friendship, convened in a previous (lost) letter. The emperor had been previously informed of the situation in Gaul by an Austrasian embassy led by

Iocundus and Chotro, which probably left Francia in the spring (584).⁵¹ Through this embassy, the emperor possibly found out that his candidate Gundovald had retreated to an island in 582 without the promised local support (Greg. *Hist.* 6.24 [s.a. 582]). At the same time, the imperial forces in Italy certainly communicated that the Lombards had organized a kingdom, which, as the emperor certainly had the means to find out, the Austrasian court had just legitimized with a peace treaty. He was right to ask for his money back. It is, however, unclear what kind of leverage he intended to use in case Childebert decided, as he eventually did, to ignore him.

What moved Childebert to invade Italy in 584? The imperial subsidy, about which the emperor reminded the king, seems an unlikely explanation. According to Gregory, the king was dismissive of the emperor's demands, brushing aside his demands without a second thought (*Hist.* 6.42 [s.a. 584]). Gregory also suggests that, the imperial complains notwithstanding, the operation in Italy was indeed a success. Childebert returned home 'once he accomplished all he wanted'(cf. *Hist.* 9.20 [s.a. 588]), adding that, after his victory, the Lombards promised to be faithful 'to his side' (*parte eius*), that is, not to the Burgundians (*Hist.* 6.42 [s.a. 584]). Eradicating the Lombards was thus never the goal. The move seems to be connected to a new aggressive Austrasian policy, which included linking with opposition forces in Neustria (which were possibly involved in Chilperic's assassination) (*Hist.* 7.10 [s.a. 584] and 7.32 [s.a. 585]) and bringing Gundovald back to the field (*Hist.* 6.46 [s.a. 584]; Ewig 1976a, 143; 1983, 39; Goffart 2012, 10, n. 34). The submission of the Lombard kingdom to the court in Metz left Guntram's flank open to attacks and the looming threat of a combined action involving the Lombards, the Austrasians, and Gundovald. The thrust against Guntram gained more momentum when Chilperic died, and his kingdom was in theory left to Childebert.⁵² The animosity grew between Childebert and Guntram, whom Gregory describes moving to Paris to block Austrasian advances into Chilperic's territory, safeguarding Fredegund and acknowledging Chlothar II as Chilperic's heir (*Hist.* 7.4, 6, 7 [s.a. 584]).

⁵⁰ For the dating of *Ep. Aust.* 42, see n. 30.

⁵¹ On the embassy, see Goubert 1951a, 104–09. *Ep. Aust.* 42 refers to Childebert's envoys boasting 'with importune childish words, which brought nothing useful'. Whether this embassy was able to report on the 584 campaign, and whether the emperor knew of its outcome when he wrote back to Childebert, depends on finer points of the chronology that evade us. (When in the summer was the Italian campaign over? When did the embassy left? If they left before the results of the campaign, did news of the outcome reach Maurice before September?) *Ep. Aust.* 42 makes no direct mention of the campaign.

⁵² According to the Treaty of Nogent (Greg. *Hist.* 6.3 [s.a. 581]); Chilperic,

however, left an heir, the future Chlothar II, whom Chilperic had kept from the public; (*Hist.* 6.41 [s.a. 584]).

The 585 campaign

Independent of the presence of nagging imperial envoys (Greg. *Hist.* 8.18 [s.a. 585]), the next Italian campaign sprang from this same context. The months that followed the Italian campaign demonstrated the political reach of a senior Merovingian king, as Guntram pulled a victory from the jaws of defeat. In early 585, Guntram accused the Austrasian aristocracy of being behind Gundovald, while at the same time he moved to remove Childebert from the aristocratic clique, recognizing his adulthood, returning the territories that had once belonged to Sigibert, and advising him at the same time to keep Egidius and his likes at arm's length (*Hist.* 7.33 [s.a. 585]). Guntram's move precipitated a rearrangement of forces in the Austrasian court, which gradually took place in the course of 585.⁵³ This quick shift in politics probably pushed some of the sidelined aristocrats to plot against Childebert's life—but the king was duly warned by his uncle (*Hist.* 7.33 [s.a. 585]; Goffart 1957, 115, n 192; Ewig 1983, 40; Wood 1994b, 97–98). With the situation somewhat patched with Childebert, Guntram gathered a large army against Gundovald, whom he defeated without Austrasian assistance in February (*Hist.* 7.34–38 [s.a. 585]; Ewig 1983, 40). In the spring, the rapport with Metz was once again jeopardized, as the assertive Guntram entered Paris, where he reaffirmed his support of Chilperic's heir, the infant Chlothar II, whom the king had previously disinherited (*Hist.* 8.8 and 8.18 [s.a. 585]).⁵⁴ The movement put Austrasian interests at risk, given that Childebert had hoped to acquire a significant share of his uncle's kingdom—to which he would have a claim, had Chilperic died heirless.⁵⁵ Adding to the pressure, in his witch-hunt to find the murderer of Chilperic and the culprits behind Gundovald, Guntram turned against Brunhild, who he believed had been involved with Gundovald (*Hist.* 7.33, 34 [s.a. 585], 9.28 and 32 [s.a. 589]).⁵⁶ The mother queen, finally back to the political scene, was in all likelihood concerned that the post-Chilperic rearrangement of Merovingian politics was not over, and that Guntram would turn on Austrasia next.

⁵³ Greg. *Hist.* 7.14 (s.a. 584), in late January Egidius is exiled 7.33 (s.a. 585); see Ewig 1983, 40, compare with Goffart 1957, 115, n. 192.

⁵⁴ His relationship with Fredegund, however, worsened: Greg. *Hist.* 8.9 (s.a. 585); see Ewig 1976a, 144–45.

⁵⁵ According to Childebert's adoption by the Treaty of Stone Bridge (577), Greg. *Hist.* 5.17 (s.a. 577).

By mid-585 Guntram had secured his hold over Paris, and influence, even if somewhat ineffectual, over Chlothar. Arguably to counter Guntram's expanding influence, the Austrasians once again threatened to destabilize Italy. In the summer, Childebert, using the previous imperial demands as a *casus belli*, sent in an army. The invasion, it seems, aimed to prepare for the next phase of the *bellum civile*, reminding Guntram of his exposed underbelly. Presumably using the Brenner Pass, Childebert marched into Italy to bring the Lombard king under closer control. His campaign, however, produced no clear results (*Hist.* 8.18 [s.a. 585]). To mitigate the imminent loss of political capital in northern Italy, Austrasian diplomacy reached out to Authari and offered Chlodosind, one of Childebert's sisters, in marriage, a proposition which the Lombard king promptly accepted (*Hist.* 9.25 [s.a. 587]). Authari did not pose an immediate threat to Austrasia, since Bavaria provided a buffer zone between the two of them, but furthering Austrasian control of Guntram's flank still made tactical sense. If he could not subdue the Lombards by force, he could at least bring them closer by marriage.

Authari's new army

After the Frankish incursion of 585, Authari did not remain inactive. Counting on Frankish connivance, the new king confronted the Byzantine loyalists in Italy and expanded the area subjected to his authority. It is hard to know the extent of his victories, but he certainly received good press in the surviving sources. The northern Italian *Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper*, always a supporter of strong leadership (Muhlberger 1998), praises the king's victory over the Franks (possibly combining the 584 campaign with the draw in 585, the following victory in 588, and the relative success in 590): By his cleverness and his prudence, [Authari] restored the Lombard forces, which had been shattered in Gaul; he overthrew the Franks who were spread out in Italy, plundering far and wide, and killed their duke Olo in the fortress of Tiligona

(CH 1532)

But John of Biclarum also gives the king a similar assessment: The Lombards in Italy elected a king from their own people, called Authari, in whose time the Romans soldiers were completely slaughtered, and the Lombards took possession of the borders of Italy (Joh. Bic. s.a. 581.1). [Later, in 586, he] met the Romans in battle and

was victorious; after the slaughter of a multitude of Roman soldiers, he occupied the borders of Italy

(s.a. 586.1)

Different from the *CH*, John's report focused on Authari's conflicts with the pro-Byzantine forces in the peninsula. With the 'borders of Italy' (*fines/termini Italiae*), however, he most likely refers to the Po,⁵⁷ meaning that Authari was able to muster the Lombard forces in the upper Po Valley and impose his authority to the limits of Tuscany.⁵⁸ In 585 Smaragdus, the exarch in Ravenna, sued for a three years' peace (*HL* 3.18; *Ep. Pelagii Iunioris Papae ad Episcopos Histriae*, in *MGH Ep.* 2, App. III.1, 442–445, 442;).⁵⁹ Sometime after that, Authari likely took control of the fortress at the Isola Comacina, where Paul suggests there was still a *magister militum* loyal to the empire. Also according to Paul, Authari sent an army under Childebert's ally Euin, duke of Trent, to subdue Istria, by then in the hands of the independent Friulan duke Grasulf. Euin's participation suggests the Austrasian court was either consenting or at least not opposed to Authari's consolidation.

All contemporary sources praise Authari's military achievements and his capacity to turn the riffraff Lombards into a respectable fighting force. In the background of these successes, the organization of the Lombard army was also evolving. It was suggested in [Chapter 2](#) that the tax-based system that supported the Lombard army in the initial stage quickly collapsed and arguably brought down the monarchy with it, pushing the Lombards to procure employment with Byzantium, or to join local forces raiding nearby targets. By the seventh century, these soldiers had become settled landowners, or so Rothari's *Edict* suggests, which means that at some between the 570s and the 640s the Lombard soldiers acquired land (see [Chapter 5](#)).⁶⁰ There is no need to associate this shift towards landownership as a result of military service, assuming that land was granted in connection with military obligation, an association absent from Rothari's *Edict*.⁶¹ If the development in the nearby Byzantine-controlled territories can serve as guidance, it is more likely that the Lombard soldiers bought land. The process is familiar to scholars of Byzantine Italy (Brown 1984, 90ff., 101–08), and there is no reason not to extend it to the rest of the peninsula.⁶² It could be argued that, after the end of turmoil of the 560s, soldiers were the only part of society receiving any sort of regular income in northern Italy: besides the taxes recently assigned directly to them by Alboin's accommodation system (which, as mentioned, were probably far from reliable), they shared the profits of military campaigns against non-aligned cities and regions. In addition to that, already in the 570s some of them had access to imperial funds in occasional subsidies and

negotiations, which (one could assume) trickled to the soldiers in one way or another. At the same time, the economic decline hit local landowners hard who, arguably indebted, transferred their properties to the now (relatively) affluent soldiers. Additionally, the significant drop in population due to war, famine, and disease, made land plentiful (but hard to put into value), and hence probably cheap.⁶³ In this way, soldiers gained full ownership not only of many of the holdings whose tax output was already earmarked to support troops (the *casa ordinata tributaria*),⁶⁴ but also purchased regular tracts of land. Granted, despite the apparent normality, the process was in all likelihood neither peaceful nor ordered: one can envision all sorts of abuses committed by soldiers to constrain landowners by using their tax entitlement to turn debt into possession of land, or even by confiscating properties outright illegally. This sort of land grabbing can be seen in the following generations of other barbarian settlements (Goffart 1980, esp. 228–29). The transformation of the soldiers into landholders and the collapse of much of civilian landed capital arguably produced an unforeseen consequence: since soldiers were traditionally exempt from land tax, the more land property reverted to soldiers, the less the accommodation system could work, because fewer taxes were collected.⁶⁵ And since most of the taxation was simplified by the accommodation system, the transformation of soldiers into a dominant share of the landholders also meant the disappearance of taxes in the long run, with the possible exception of smaller contributions (Gasparri 2004, 34–42; 2011; Wickham 2005, 115–20).⁶⁶ The families of veterans, nonetheless, preserved their military obligations in connection with those holdings (see [Chapter 5](#)).

57 The *limes Italiae* here do not necessarily mean the entire peninsula—to the south, Italy has no *limites* in the classical sense; for the definition of *limes*, see Whittaker 1994, esp. 200–02. The term refers, most likely, to the limits of *Italy*, that is, between *cis-* and *transpadanian* Italy, i.e., *Italia* and *Gallia Cisalpina*, in the classical terms, or *Italia Magna* and *Minor*, in what seems to have been incorporated to the official terminology at the period. Authari made it to the Po, which fits the concept of a *limes*; see Is. *Ety.* 14.4.26; for *Italia Magna* and *Minor*, see Greg. *Hist.* 3.32; Walter Pohl comments on the terminology in Pohl 2002, 138.

58 Paul’s report of Authari extending his reach over Benevento and Spoleto should be dismissed in the same way as the king marking the future Lombard territory with his spear (*HL* 3.32); it is based on a later claim to the entire peninsula.

59 Theoph. *Chron.* 6080 mentions that the Lombards resumed their campaign in 588 (or possibly 587); for the truce, see Goubert 1951b, 28.

60 The evidence for landholding in Rothari’s *Edict* abounds; the main laws are: *LLRot* 33, 34, 130, 133, 144–45, 151–52, 227, 236–41, 277, 281–306, 332–33, 342, 345–58.

61 Eighth-century Lombard legislation, however, points out that military service became, by then, connected to wealth, usually expressed in landholding: see

LLAhist. 2. Note, nonetheless, that similar requisitions are made to merchants, based on non-landed capital (*LLAhist* 3). For the link between land and military service, see Petersen 2013, 184, and, for the West, Halsall 2003, 81–84; Goffart 2008. The argument for such a connection has also been dismissed for the Byzantine east (Haldon 1997, 245, cf. Carrié 1995, 48).

- 62 For reference of Byzantine soldiers in Italy buying and selling land, see Pohl 2013, 291–92. Such evidence is, nonetheless, absent from the Lombard-controlled Italy, though the fact might be ascribed to the rich papyri evidence preserved for Ravenna, absent in the rest of the peninsula. For soldiers buying land in the West, see Halsall 2003, 46. That certainly does not preclude land given as rewards by commanders or patrons, especially considering the large amount of land with absent owners in northern Italy (Goffart 1980, *passim*; Petersen 2013, 55). The idea, however, that land was distributed in a large-scale collectivization finds no support in the documentation; *contra* Bognetti 1966–68, 75ff.; Tagliaferri 1969, 15–17; Fumagalli 1978, 435ff.; Tabacco 1979, 120ff., and more recently, Gasparri 2011, 79; Gasparri 2012, 46.
- 63 This process of transference of land was already suggested by Goffart (1980, 220–30) as one of the mechanisms that turned the settled barbarians into landowners. A similar process of taxation leading to the loss of property, which ended up in military hands, can be argued for the still-Byzantine part of Italy (Brown 1984, 105). For the low value of the land, see Brown 1984, 8–9; Grierson 1961, 48, and Bellinger and Grierson 1966, vol. 2.1, 29. The conclusion is based on the fluctuation of the average price of the *fundus* in charters from 150.4 *solidi* between 535 and 541 (*P. Dip.* 114, 116, 117, 118 and 119) to 20 *solidi* between 572 and 592 (*P. Dip.* 120, 121, 122). The references are, evidently, for the Byzantine area, but I see no reason not to extent the general tendency to the rest of northern Italy, though regional specifics are certainly beyond the scope of our source material. See also Pohl 1997a, 129, following Jarnut 1982, 98.
- 64 For the *casa ordinata tributaria* (*Rot* 252), see p. 62 (as part of the tax system), and pp. 171–72 (as part of the military support for military households). The limited role of the *casa tributaria* in the *Edict* suggests that it was but one of the ways the Lombards held land.
- 65 Tax exemption for soldiers: *CTh.* 7.20; see Jones 1964a, 635; Goffart 1974, 53–60; Whitby 1995, 66; Carrié 1995, 45; Lee 2007, 81ff., more recently, Petersen 2013, 54. For a suggestion of a similar process in Merovingian Gaul, see Goffart 2008, 184–85. The Gothic kings in Spain were more aware of the risks of transferring taxable land to soldiers, mandating taxable land to be returned to the ‘Roman’ owners: see *Lib. Iud.* 10.1.16.
- 66 More generally, on the destinies of taxation in the West, see, 1974, 1989, 1982, and more recently, Goffart 2008.

This transition should also be seen in relation to life cycles of the military communities. Although admittedly speculative, it is worth trying to picture this transformation from recipients of taxes into landowners regarding age groups and generations (as already suggested in Halsall 2007, 439ff.) and sketch thus the connections between this transition and the known availability of military manpower for the Lombard army. There is no information for the time of service of Lombard soldiers (which was more likely determined by fitness than regulation), but using the Roman army as a model, an

approximate 20–25 years of service can be suggested, after which soldiers probably considered retiring.⁶⁷ Hence, it can be suggested that the group that rebelled with Alboin was looking for retirement on average in 15–20 years, taking into account not only variations on the terms of service, but also that some soldiers were enlisted before 568 (some as early as 552). Thus, at some point between c.583 and c.588, those who could acquired land and settled down. Consequently, soldiers serving from 588 on were, more and more, born in Italy from families with landed property therein, in a stark contrast with the 568 army whose soldiers mostly came from outside the peninsula. Thus, three different periods emerge: first, the period from 568–c.583, in which Alboin's troops were active; second, a transitional period from c.583 on, when that generation started gradually to retire, the older soldiers as early as 583, the younger as late as 588; and finally, from c.588–618, in which the majority of the soldiers could rely on their landed properties.

67 The *comitatenses* would receive the *honesta missio* after 20 years, and the *emerita missio*, with full privileges, after 24 (*CTh.* 7.20.4 [a.325]). In 325, this privilege was also granted to the *riparienses* (instead of the previous 24 years for the *honesta missio*). Officers could, however, continue serving, and they probably had benefits of doing so; see Jones 1964a, 635. The units that rebelled in 568 were, like every army, composed of soldiers of different generations, and enlisted in different periods (see Ch. 1 above).

The dates are evidently speculative: this approximate chronology can, nonetheless, shed some light on the role of life cycle on the capabilities of the army. In the first period (c.568–583), the soldiers brought from elsewhere rebelled against imperial authorities. These troops provided a reliable force for Alboin to guarantee the survival of the rebellion and were supported by the accommodation system, which Alboin managed to establish in northern Italy. Once the tax system started to crumble, Alboin (and after him Cleph) lost the support of the troops, and local dukes got rid of the monarchy altogether (c.574). Knowing quite well that arrears and delays could produce dangerous outbursts of violence, these dukes deployed their soldiers as mercenaries in different theaters: the following ten years were the highest point of adventurism and mercenary service. In the early 580s, however, veterans from the first generation were probably verging on the end of their fighting days and looking for a place to settle down; investment in land (which had always been an option) became more intense. This period is the turning of the tide for the Lombard monarchy: these soldiers, presumably by then respectable landowners and family men, were more likely to favor Authari's monarchic stability over ducal adventurism. Finally, by 588, this

transition was likely over, and the Lombard army was solidly supported by private properties in the Po Valley, with recruits owing military service to their local commanders (dukes) or directly to the king—that is indeed the society depicted in Rothari’s *Edict* (see pp. 164–70). This new generation provided a renewed armed force that could support the ambitions of the new kingship. If that periodization stands, it explains Authari’s renewed military strength in 588 and, as discussed the next chapter, the military resources available to Agilulf’s ambitious political plans (see [Chapter 4](#)).

The 588 campaign

Back in Francia, the death of the *nutritor* Wandelenus in the fall of 585 allowed Brunhild to gain her full influence over Childebert and the Austrasian court, and consolidate a policy of strengthening monarchical power against aristocratic interests, which opened a way to a rapprochement with Guntram, even if a cold one (Greg. *Hist.* 8.22 [s.a. 586]; Ewig 1983, 42). The Austrasian court did not fully warm to Guntram, who at that point still held a number of territories claimed by Childebert.⁶⁸ A new antagonism between the two courts came about in 586–87, when Recared, the new Visigothic king, reached out for the Franks to improve relations, given that now both kingdoms were Catholic. The envoys were well received by Childebert but shunned by Guntram (*Hist.* 9.1 and 9.16 [s.a. 587]; Ewig 1983, 45; Goubert 1951a, 71–73). In Austrasia, the peace offerings from the previous year grew into a close alliance. The envoys seem to have confirmed a deal that involved reparation for what had happened to Ingund (in the form of 10,000 *solidi*) and a new marital alliance between the king and Chlodosind, Childebert’s sister (the same sister already promised to Authari); it remains uncertain whether it also included the defensive pact originally intended by Recared (Greg. *Hist.* 9.1. [s.a. 587]). Childebert’s new strategy, with its obvious risk of antagonizing Guntram, shows the growing confidence of the now fully mature king and his desire to stretch his military muscles. The new approach meant building up the relationship with Spain and possibly also expanding Austrasian military presence in Guntram’s Italian flank, or even restoring the old Austrasian direct control of the region. At the same time, the Austrasian court kept the appearance of cooperating with Guntram, and acknowledging his opinion on foreign policy (*Hist.* 9.16 [s.a. 587], 9.20 [s.a. 588]). The new nuptials of Chlodosind highlight this new diplomatic alignment, at one stroke sealing the alliance with Recared and breaking ties with Authari, trading thus good relations with the Lombards, whom Guntram supported, for friendship with the Visigoths, whose territory Guntram

planned to invade.

The new policy apparently upset Guntram, who attempted to patch up the relationship diplomatically through a more comprehensive peace treaty, guaranteeing Childebert as his heir, while at the same time returning territories his nephew claimed (Treaty of Andelot, a. 587).⁶⁹ If Guntram expected Andelot to prevent a pivot in Austrasian policy, he was disappointed,⁷⁰ although the question of Italy and Spain indeed loomed large in the negotiations. In an exchange between the Austrasian envoy Felix and Guntram, where Gregory was present as Childebert's envoy, the old king shot down both the marriage proposal for Chlodosind ('it would not be ideal if my niece were to go where her sister was murdered') and cooperation in the Italian campaign ('I cannot send my army to Italy to die [of the terrible plague rampant there]') (*Hist.* 9.20 [s.a. 588]). Childebert, nonetheless, went ahead with both projects. Guntram, who probably never thought Childebert reliable, perceived the new Austrasian policy as a threat—by early 588, he received Childebert's envoy, Gregory of Tours, at his court, and asked him about the king's reliability (Greg. *Hist.* 9.20 [s.a. 588]).⁷¹

⁶⁸ Which included the question of the Paris, Meaux, Senlis, Tours, Poitiers, Avranches, Aire, Couserans, but also territories in southern France, such as Bordeaux, Limoges, Cahors, Lescar, Cieutat, that were part of the *morgengabe* of Galswinth (Brunhild's sister, married to Chilperic and allegedly murdered by Fredegund) and were claimed by Brunhild—all these claims were dealt with later on as part of the Treaty of Andelot (587): Greg. *Hist.* 9.20.

⁶⁹ For the text, see Greg. *Hist.* 9.20–21. On Andelot, see Ewig 1976a, 146; Esders 2016, 445–47, cf. Widdowson 2009, 15–21.

⁷⁰ Ewig 1976a, 146. For continuing conflicts between the two kings, see *Hist.* 9.10, 11, 14, 16 (s.a. 587), 9.20 (s.a. 588), 9.32 (s.a. 589), 10.28 (s.a. 591), see Wood 1994b, 90–91; Van Dam 2005, 204–05; Widdowson 2009, 15–21.

⁷¹ Gregory was not able to fully dispel Guntram's concerns, see again 9.28 (s.a. 589) and 9.32 (s.a. 589).

Since Guntram evidently refused to help on an Italian campaign, Childebert reached out to emperor Maurice (*Hist.* 9.25 [s.a. 588]). In late 587, Childebert sent an embassy to Constantinople, possibly through Sicily, carrying a large number of letters to a variety of highly placed people (*Ep. Aust.* 25–39; see p. 89).⁷² The goal of the embassy was the rekindling of friendship, but all letters carried with them notice of instructions that were given orally, on an affair of 'common interest'.⁷³ The secret topic was, most likely, the incoming Austrasian campaign in Italy.⁷⁴ The significant number of addressees suggests a substantial Austrasian investment in bribes, which probably accompanied the letters as gifts. The Austrasian effort to gain imperial support seems to have fallen short. A second attempt, this time linking

directly with Ravenna through Laurentius, the bishop of Milan, also failed (*Ep. Aust.* 46).⁷⁵

Unable to orchestrate a combined attack, Childebert marched into Italy nonetheless. When the Austrasian troops crossed the Alps, however, they ran into an opposition stiffer than in 585, and this time the Lombards were victorious. ‘The slaughter of the Frankish army there’, says Gregory, ‘was such that nothing similar in the past could be remembered’ (*Hist.* 9.25 [s.a. 588]). Authari, leading the revamped army that had secured to him control of the Po Valley, proved once again effective. Nonetheless, he did not follow up on his victory. Instead, he sent for the Franks, offering peace and tribute (*Hist.* 9.29 [s.a. 589]). Although that arrangement added up simply to a reinstatement of the *status quo ante*, it was enough to dissuade Childebert from resuming the attack in 589.⁷⁶ The agreement mostly benefitted Guntram, who preferred an alliance between Franks and Lombards to direct Austrasian control of Italy, and it is tempting to see him behind Authari’s diplomatic effort.⁷⁷ Profiting from Childebert’s unfortunate campaign, Guntram maintained his influence over the Lombards, while at the same time allaying Childebert’s fear that they could be used against Austrasia.

⁷² On the practice of sending letters to the emperor’s entourage, see Gillett 2010, 150–52.

⁷³ Ewig 1983, 46. Goubert (1951a, 127–29) lists all the greetings, showing the overall emphasis on the ‘general profit’ of the proposition. There are letters addressed to the emperor and the royal family, to high ecclesiastical (e.g., the patriarch of Constantinople) and lay (e.g., the questor, a *magister*, and the Byzantine patrician in Sicily) figures.

⁷⁴ And not the release of Athanagild, as has been suggested. For the intention of this embassy, see p. 89, n. 47.

⁷⁵ I agree with Goubert (1951a, 183–86) that the context of this letter is the same as *Ep. Aust.* 25–39, although I disagree it went in the same batch. In *Ep. Aust.* 46, the invasion is openly defended, which, in my understanding, suggests Childebert had a more reliable route, probably from Marseille to Genoa (where the bishop of Milan was since 569). Also *contra* Goubert, I believe the harsh tone of the letter has nothing to do with a recent defeat, but instead, the emphasis on Lombard aggression and religious persecution was probably aimed at swaying a bishop whose relations with the Lombards had improved much since they accepted a peace treaty with the exarch in 585. Clearly, Childebert found no appetite for war in the imperial side.

⁷⁶ I do not see a reason to follow Loseby, who suggests this arrangement did not pan out, leading to the 590 campaign; in the negotiations after the 590 invasion, at least as Gregory reports them, the Lombards emphasized that they never broke their oath, see *Greg. Hist.* 10.3, and below, pp. 106–07.

⁷⁷ Gregory mentions Guntram’s intervention after 590 (*Greg. Hist.* 10.3), for 588, it remains speculative, but see *Greg. Hist.* 9.29 (s.a. 589). In any case, only when Childebert’s campaign in Italy was settled (and Guntram’s flank remained protected), the old king was free to launch his invasion of Septmania, which

also turned out to be a disaster (Greg. *Hist.* 9.31 [s.a. 589]); Guntram suspected Austrasian treason (Greg. *Hist.* 9.32).

Childebert, however, was likely able to set the terms of the new agreement. He first found for Authari a new wife, Theudelinda, the daughter of the duke of Bavaria, thereby mending the previous arrangement he had ruined by offering his own sister to the Visigothic king. The marriage linked the Lombards to the Bavarian duke Garipald, whose first daughter had already married the duke of Trent.⁷⁸ Additionally, Childebert might have gained indirect control of Asti, a passage in the Cottian Alps (facing Burgundian territory), which he entrusted to Gundwald, Theudelinda's brother. The queen also brought to Italy another brother, Grimoald, whose fate is unknown, but who might have held a different city.⁷⁹ The politics behind that choice—the interaction between the Burgundian and Austrasian courts and the middling noble families on the fringes of the Merovingian world—remains elusive, but the links between the Franks and the Lombard kings certainly gained stability with the association of Authari and Theudelinda.

The empire strikes back

The 590 Italian campaign is usually seen as the final (and likewise failed) attempt of the empire to pull the Franks into Italy (e.g., Boggetti 1966–68, 174–78; Delogu 1980, 27–28; Wickham 1981, 32–33; Jarnut 1982, 38–39; Christie 1995, 87–89). This reading proceeds first from the belief that Frankish policy was motivated by an unfulfilled promise of military support in Italy, and, second, the notion that the empire espoused an unwavering commitment to restore Italy. As seen above, the former overlooks internal politics in Gaul and oversimplifies the foreign policy of the Austrasian court. The latter ignores the goals and regional drives of Byzantine strategy. The endgame of the imperial campaign in Italy, it is suggested below, was not the destruction of the Lombards. It responded instead to military imperatives connected to the Balkan theater. This plan had no need for Frankish support, even if it is likely that the emperor communicated to Childebert his intentions in the peninsula.⁸⁰ The Frankish presence in Italy, however, was not coincidental. The significant show of force of the imperial army in northern Italy, for the first time in more than decade, represented a threat to the status quo the Austrasian had recently established, and it could not go unchallenged.

⁷⁸ CH 1533; on the Bavarians, see p. 71, n. 5. I do not see support for the idea

that a larger Bavaro-Lombard coalition against the Franks was behind the marriage of Theudelinda and Authari, as suggested by Fritze 1994, 75–76.

- 79 For the two brothers, see Fred. 4.34; The *Origo* c. 6, *Cod. Goth.* c. 6, and Paul HL 3.30 mentions only Gundobaldus; Gundobaldus as duke of Asti: HL 4.40; the Frankish duke grew in popularity and ended up murdered (Fred. 4.34; HL 4.40).
- 80 In an embassy that reached Metz in late spring 590 (Greg. *Hist.* 10.3 [s.a. 590]).

Eastern perspectives

The first three Austrasian campaigns happened without any substantial imperial military involvement. Constantinople had more pressing business elsewhere (Whitby 2001a, 102–08). Since 576, when an expedition under Baduarius was crushed by the Lombards (Joh. Bicl. s.a. 576; see p. 72), the empire had refrained from putting boots on the ground in northern Italy. Even if the prospect of a large section of the peninsula under Lombard control was far from ideal, Italy (and the Lombards) still played an important role for the empire. The Lombards supplied soldiers to the imperial armies, which were regularly used to buttress the Byzantine forces fighting both in the East and in the Balkans (Theo. Sim. 6.11.12, 8.5.6; Greg. *Reg.* 14.10 [Guduin]; Theo. Sim. 2.17.9 [Droctulf]). The elevation of Authari threatened to change this arrangement—indeed, by the end of his reign in 590, the number of Lombard troops serving the empire had dropped dramatically. Nonetheless, the key regions of the peninsula, Rome, Ravenna, and Sicily, remained firmly in imperial hands and the Lombards ranked low in the empire's priorities.

In 590, when Maurice (582–602) decided to send a military detachment to Italy, he was not moved by a newly found devotion to the Italian cause. His objectives were more likely connected to the Balkans, where the Avars posed an imminent threat to Constantinople, a menace the Lombards could never match (Sarris 2011, 170–82; Curta 2006, esp. 67–69; Liebeschuetz 2007, 114–31).⁸¹ In 584, the Avars had increased the pressure on the Danubian frontier, demanding a higher tribute, which led Maurice to enter into a conflict for which he lacked troops (Whitby 1988, 138–84; 2001b, 105–06). Two years later, the Avars defeated the *magister militum* Commentiolus and attacked the Long Wall (aka 'Anastasian Wall', linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, c.65 km from Constantinople), besieging Adrianople in the process. They would have breached its defenses, and maybe even sieged Constantinople, had not Droctulf, a Lombard in Byzantine service, saved the day, outmaneuvering the Avars and breaking the siege (Theo. Sim. 2.17.9–12). In 588, Priscus, the *magister militum per Thracias*, faced another disaster at Avar hands: the *magister militum* lost some key cities and, with his retreat to the Long

Wall cut off by the *chagan*, he was besieged in Tzurullon (close to the modern Greek-Turkish border) (Whitby 1988, 151–55). In an especially hard blow to Byzantine morale, the Avars took Anchialus (close to modern Pomorie, Bulgaria), where the *chagan* paraded in front of his troops wearing captured imperial robes.⁸²

81 On the Avars, see Avenarius 1974; Pohl 1988, 2003b; Daim 2003; Sarantis 2016b, 375–77. For Maurice's campaign against the Avars, see Whitby 1988, 292–97; Liebeschuetz 2007, 120–22; Sarantis 2016b, 383–86.

82 The clothes, which the *chagan* found in a local church, had been donated by the empress Anastasia, and Michael the Syrian claims that he donned them as an open challenge to Byzantine authority (Mich. Syr. 10.21; Pohl 1988, 76–82; Whitby 1988, 153–55; 2001b, 105).

The siege of Tzurullon, however, revealed a strategic weakness in the Avars' seasonal raiding towards the Long Wall. While the Avars were besieging Priscus, the Byzantines devised an ingenious plan: Maurice sent one of his bodyguards to Tzurullon, with a letter supposedly to Priscus, but intended to be intercepted. In the letter, the emperor claimed that the siege had not changed the imperial resolve and that a new army was on the move towards the Avar-occupied Sirmium. The Avars took the bait, settled for peace, and rushed back (Theo. Sim. 6.5.14–15; Theoph. s.a. 6084; Ion. Zon. 14.12). Sirmium had been occupied by the Avars earlier in 581, after which it had become an important hub for their army (Men. *frag.* 25.1–2, 27.1–3; Pohl 1988; Whitby 1988, 87–88; 2007, 157; Liebeschuetz 2007, 116–20; Sarantis 2016b, 376). Priscus's fake threat to Sirmium forced the Avar *chagan* to double back to cover his flanks (Theo. Sim. 6.5.16 claims for a 'minimal sum', though Mich. Syr. 10.11 suggests a hefty 800 pounds of gold). Most Avar attacks hailed from that city, usually heading east through Moesia into Thracia and towards the Long Wall: this long thrust, however, left Sirmium's western flank exposed (Whitby 1988, 145–55). The city proved to be a strategic position, which the Avars would hurry to protect even if that meant abandoning an ongoing campaign (Caldwell 2012, 102).

The vulnerability of Sirmium is what brought Italy into play: if the Byzantines could resume control of northern Italy, the empire could not only rely again on Lombard mercenaries but also use Friuli to open a new front against the Avars. This two-front thrust had first been conceived by Tiberius (578–82) in 581. Then, he had negotiated with Lombard mercenaries in Italy to open a western front against the Avars. The campaign, however, never happened (Joh. Eph. 6.30 32).⁸³ In 590, the time seemed ripe for another try: the renewed Byzantine military efforts in the East had brought the Persians to the brink of collapse—indeed, by February 590, a military rebellion had deposed

Hormisd (soon followed by the exile of his heir, Khurso II) and driven the Persians into a civil war.⁸⁴ With the prospect of peace with Persia, Maurice could turn his resources to the Balkans, where he prepared a bold thrust towards Anchialus in the fall of 590, insisting, against the best advice of his councilors, on personally leading the troops (Theo. Sim. 5.16.2–4). The safety of the emperor demanded a massive operation to guarantee that the Avars would not attempt a counterattack. Opening a new front from Italy would provide the necessary diversion.

The campaign against the Lombards was to start in earnest early that summer (590). To assure the preparation on the western front, Romanus, an experienced military commander, was sent to Italy to replace Smaragdus.⁸⁵ Some details of the first phase of the Byzantine campaign are known from a letter Romanus sent Childeburt that summer (*Ep. Aust.* 40). The campaign started in April or, at latest, in May 590, in a well-coordinated thrust into the lower Po Valley and Veneto, involving detachments of the army and navy.⁸⁶ The amassing of troops, supplies, and equipment in the region possibly started in the previous year, before the Mediterranean was closed to navigation.⁸⁷ The Byzantine army stormed three key cities, two in the eastern Po Valley (the strategically located Mantua and Modena), and the maritime Altinum in the Veneto (possibly as a bridgehead to access the province). The Byzantines then occupied these positions, presumably securing access to Veneto and deploying on the lower Po Valley. The Byzantine navy provided support, using *dromoi* possibly to control the Venetian coast and establish a supply line on the Po (*Ep. Aust.* 40). In the meantime, Authari and the other Lombard commanders retreated to the fortified cities bracing for the attack.

⁸³ The commander in chief for the expedition, Narses (not the one who invited the Lombards into Italy: *PLRE*, ‘Narses 4’, 930–31), died on the way; the Lombards never came.

⁸⁴ The Persians descended into civil war after Maurice’s campaigns in 588–89 (Theo. Sim. 3.18.12–4.10.7; Whitby 1988, 276–304; Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 171–72; Sarris 2011, 234–36). They would negotiate peace in 591 (Theo. Sim. 5.15.2).

⁸⁵ A certain Julianus (*PLRE*, Julianus 22, vol. 3a, 738) might have served as exarch between Smaragdus and Romanus, in 588/9, but he is poorly attested (Goubert 1951b, 89–92).

⁸⁶ The dating of the campaign is based on *Ep. Aust.* 40, in which Romanus described a number of military objectives accomplished before the Franks got to Verona. The *terminus ante quem* for the Frankish campaign is relatively clear: Gregory of Tours mentions that the Franks remained in Italy for ‘nearly three months’ and that while Lombard envoys were negotiating a truce, Authari died (see pp. 112–13). The death of Authari is attested in *HL* 3.35 as September 5th, 590 (see also Gregory I, *Reg.* 1.17). Hence, the Franks, who were in Italy for roughly three months before that, must have crossed the Alps at some point

around early June, at which point the Byzantines were already controlling a significant territory in the lower Po Valley (*Ep. Aust.*, 40). Even considering a fulminating attack—which seems unlikely against cities, which *Ep. Aust.* 40 is very explicit were taken in combat—the Byzantine campaign could not have started before early May. April is the most likely.

- 87 The Mediterranean was closed from November 11th to March 10th. A concise source for the navigability of the Mediterranean in different season is Vegetius, *Ep. rei mil.* 4.39.7. For navigation times and seasons, see McCormick 2001, 444–500.

While the Byzantines were securing their position in the eastern Po Valley, however, a Frankish army entered Italy, commanded by a certain *vir magnificus* Ethenus (whom Gregory of Tours calls Chedinus, *Hist.* 10.3 [s.a. 590]).⁸⁸ Gregory sums up the Frankish attack plan. The Frankish army had crossed the Brenner pass and split along two fronts: the one, commanded by Audovald (and Olo), turned right, towards Milan and, after initial skirmishes, observed the Lombards retreating inside their walls; the other, commanded by Chedinus (the *Ep. Aust.*'s Ethenus), turned left towards Verona, where Romanus found it. The presence of the Franks was, it seems, unexpected, and generated an intense diplomatic exchange, of which only two letters survived: both by Romanus to Childebert, one of them the letter that informed the previous two paragraphs (*Ep. Aust.* 40 and *Ep. Aust.* 41). Nothing in this exchange suggests the Franks were operating on a predetermined plan, nor even that the Byzantines expected to find them in Italy. Indeed, both letters revolve around (failed) attempts to agree on an improvised attack plan, now that both forces were indeed in Italy. This intense negotiation possibly started by a single question from Romanus: what were the Franks doing in Italy?

What were the Franks doing in Italy?

The answer Andrea, the Austrasian envoy, gave to Romanus was that the Frankish army was there to 'liberate Italy' (*Ep. Aust.* 40), an answer that has convinced modern scholars more than it has convinced Romanus (e.g., Boggetti 1966–68, 174–78; Delogu 1980, 27–28; Wickham 1981, 32–33; Jarnut 1982, 38–39; Christie 1995, 87–89, cf. Romanus's tone in *Ep. Aust.* 40–41, diplomatic but skeptical). The Frankish dukes indeed agreed with Romanus on a plan of action, which they did not follow, negotiating instead a truce with Authari and heading back north (*Ep. Aust.* 40). Romanus communicated to the Frankish king his frustration with the actions of his commanders, and guaranteed that he had done nothing without their knowledge and approval. Furthermore, he lamented that the retreat of the Franks prevented the final extermination of the Lombards, who were still safe

inside their walls. (Gregory of Tours indeed confirms most of these developments, although the bishop places the blame for the failed cooperation on the imperial troops, *Hist.* 10.3.) Finally, Romanus finished his letter by urging Childebert to dispatch a new army into Italy as fast as possible, so that they could besiege the Lombards before they were able to harvest their crops, a plea he repeated sometime later in *Ep. Aust.* 41. Above all, Romanus was careful not to blame Childebert, who he was certain would be saddened by the news, and whom he advised to send ‘worthy commanders’ with the new troops, ‘who would obey his [i.e., Childebert’s] orders’ (*Ep. Aust.* 40). The Franks, however, had accomplished what they came for: although dismissive of the campaign, Gregory records that the Franks, ‘after receiving oaths, turned back homeward, having submitted to the king’s control that which his father once possessed; from which places they brought away captives and booty’ (*Hist.* 10.3). They were not to cross the Alps en masse again before 754.

88 Rendered by Gundlach as ‘Henus’, when it should be ‘Ethenus’; corrected in Gil 1978, 122, followed by Malaspina 2001, 192, n. 758. For the Frankish commander, see *PLRE*, ‘Henus’, 581–82.

One can only guess Childebert’s intention as he entered Italy in 590. According to Gregory, he attacked after receiving messages from Maurice through the Frankish envoy, Gripo. After hearing the ambassador’s report, ‘the king ordered the army to be assembled without delay (*confestim*) and sent 20 dukes to fight the Lombards’ (*Hist.* 10.3). Gregory, however, recorded nothing that could have triggered such a reaction: indeed, he only mentioned the reports on the incident in Carthage and how Maurice intended to deal with it (deceitfully, it turned out, *Hist.* 10.4 [s.a. 590]), none of it suggesting a reason for Childebert to assemble the army. Certainly, something that Gripo learnt in Constantinople (but which Gregory did not find out or failed to report) made Childebert move ‘without delay’ into Italy, and scholars have usually interpreted the passage in terms of previous agreements between the Franks and the Byzantines to eliminate the Lombards (e.g., Jarnut 1982, 38–39; Goffart 1957, 111–18; Löhlein 1932, 53–74; Büttner 1960, 76–80).⁸⁹ Chronology, however, stands in the way. Even if Gripo’s embassies had rushed back to Francia, they could hardly have arrived in Metz before April, navigation in the Mediterranean being closed until March 10th; it is more likely that they were not in Francia before May.⁹⁰ If the emperor counted on the notoriously unreliable Franks to cooperate, would he send word of his plan while the Byzantine troops had already deployed? Likewise, the outcomes of the Frankish campaign are at

odds with the imperial goals—even considering those goals as the traditional (and problematic) ‘destruction of the Lombards’. The Frankish dukes confirmed Austrasian authority in the region and received oaths from the Lombards. They simply reasserted the status quo.

The status quo, which the Austrasians had established with three consecutive invasions in the 580s, had indeed been threatened in 590, but not by the Lombards. The threat came instead from the Byzantine military buildup in the region. If the empire were able to recover northern Italy, they would establish a direct frontier with the Merovingian kingdom. What is worse, a Byzantine-controlled Po Valley would assert imperial control of the Po and move the border north to the Alps. As in Roman times, the Po marked a more defensible border. Although the Alps are massive enough to constrain movement of troops, they are teeming with passages and do not constitute an insurmountable obstacle for an invading army (although they might become one during winter). As a result, the mountains forced the defenders to spread their troops over the many passes, while the attackers could always concentrate their offensive on a pass of their choice.

89 Note, however, that the embassy Chilbert sent to negotiate imperial support for an Italian campaign (Greg. *Hist.* 9.25 [s.a. 588]) was not Gripo’s, which left a year later, in 589.

90 All depends on their willingness to risk a shipwreck. For navigation times and seasons, see n. 87.

Thus, once Chilbert learnt about the imperial plans—that was possibly the startling news Gripo had brought—he invaded Italy to guarantee Frankish interests in the region. It was a show of force to reassert his dominion of the Po Valley and keep the Byzantines off. Once in Italy, Frankish and imperial diplomacy did their best to prevent confrontation, and the Franks could once again pretend to support imperial claims in the region while reaffirming their own position. The Franks conceded imperial control in Veneto (which the Byzantines secured with Gisulf, *Ep. Aust.* 41) and in the lower Po Valley (Parma, Piacenza, Modena), but left the upper Po (Pavia and Milan) and the northern passes (Verona) in the hands of the Lombards (with whom they had renewed their treaty by the end of the summer), maintaining a reasonable buffer zone between themselves and Byzantine-controlled territories. The 591 campaign that Romanus advocated to Chilbert (*Ep. Aust.* 41) indeed happened, but without Frankish support. Conspicuously, instead of further pressing the Lombards in the upper Po Valley, Romanus turned south, safeguarding the fortresses and cities linking Ravenna to Rome (*LP, Vita Gregorii I,*

66.2; see p. 113).

To the north, as soon as the Franks withdrew, Gregory of Tours states that Authari sent envoys to Guntram, saying:

We, most pious king, desire to be subjects and faithful to you and your people, as we once were to your forefathers; we have not departed from the oath which our predecessors have sworn to your precursors. Thus now cease from your hostilities against us, and let there be peace and amity, so that, when it is necessary, we shall provide support against your enemies. Once your people, but indeed also our people, are secured, let the enemies, who howl all around us, knowing we are at peace, have more reason to be terrified than to revel in our discord

(*Hist.* 10.3)

The words that Gregory puts in Authari's mouth are very telling, though it is impossible to know how close they are to the actual statements of the embassy. Guntram received the Lombard envoys well, and sent them to Childebert so that they could patch up their relations with Austrasia (*Hist.* 10.3; *contra* Petersen 2013, 205). The Lombards were obviously disconcerted by the Frankish armies in Italy, even if their objective was to counter the Byzantine advance. Late antique armies tended to wreak havoc wherever they went, in friendly or enemy territory. Gregory, however, mentions that the Frankish army paid for food on their way back to Gaul, a situation that sits awkwardly with an invading army, especially with a victorious one, and further supports the idea that the Franks were not in Italy as an offensive force (*Hist.* 10.3).

Authari died as his project was finally accomplished. The Lombards weathered a decade of political uncertainty, mostly produced by the ever-shifting agenda of their more powerful neighbors. The king left behind a realm that comprised a significant part of the Po Valley, a royal fisc (of unknown dimension), and a respectable fighting force. He also left a country torn apart between two loyalties, between those who supported the 'Lombard project' and those who resisted it. He was able to establish a lasting alliance with the Franks—which included not a small level of deference and submission, but which allowed for a freer hand in Italy. He died, nonetheless, leaving a significant Byzantine army in the process of shoring the Lombards up in the north. This dual legacy he left to Agilulf, who succeeded him.

4 To tame a land

Authari left behind a kingdom on the make but also in midst of a crisis. The dual invasion of 590 had caused serious damage to the Lombard control Po Valley. By fall 590, the Franks had left Italy, and the previous diplomatic arrangements were again in place. The imperial army, however, was still unchecked in the Po Valley, and it had reclaimed key position, including locations on the river and the land east of the Adige. The settlement between Franks and Byzantines seems to have precluded the imperial army from further action up the Po, but Romanus remained active and, turning south, he marched to restore cities on the *Via Flaminia*, securing the connection between Rome and Ravenna. Perhaps more dangerous to the integrity of the Lombard kingdom, Romanus's success triggered a reorientation of the local forces towards the empire, which jeopardized the centralization under Authari and risked unifying northern Italy against the king, instead of under him. Agilulf turned the tide and managed to bring order to Italy at long last.

The sources for Agilulf are less problematic than for Authari.¹ From this period survives the oldest royal charter, a grant for the foundation of Bobbio, even if only preserved in a later copy (*CDL* 4.1). Gregory the Great, moreover, was actively engaged with the royal court and his correspondence preserves valuable information. Other letters also provide insights into royal policy, including a letter from Columbanus to pope Boniface iv (*Ep. Col.* 5. 170–74, in *MGH*, *Ep.* 3) and one from bishop John of Aquileia to Agilulf (*Ep. Lang.* 1). The period also left two artifacts that pertain to Agilulf: the Val di Nievole plate, found in the nineteenth century, and a crown, that used to be in Monza but is now lost (La Rocca and Gasparri 2010). In addition to that, the *Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper* (*CH*) and the *Liber Pontificalis* (*LP*) were almost contemporaneous to Agilulf's reign and contain some important information. Fredegar preserved a few stories involving the king, some of which require a closer read.

¹ On Agilulf, see Bognetti 1966–68, 179–302; Schneider 1972, 28–35; Frohlich 1980, 99–125; Delogu 1980, 34–44; 2009; Jarnut 1982, 42–46, and more recently, Jarnut 2003, 424–25; McCormick 1986, 284–96; Christou 1991, 145–

As for Paul the Deacon, he also seems to have had a better source for the period between the death of Authari and the last decade of Agilulf. A number of entries, ranging from the death of Authari (*HL* 3.35; September 5th 590) at the end of Book 3, to the death of priest-cum-historian Secundus (*HL* 4.40; March, 612) in the first half of Book 4, received a very precise dating, a practice that is unusual for rest of the *HL*.² These entries came from a chronicler source now lost; they have commonly been attributed to Secundus, but are labeled here simply ‘chronicle source II’.³ This material, however, requires further distinction.⁴ Most entries receive only a general temporal marker, such as ‘on those days’ (*his diebus*) or ‘at that time’ (*hac tempestate*), and only a few entries actually received precise dates, with reference to the month and sometimes even the day.⁵ The former style of entry is rather common in the *HL*, and similar expressions are found throughout the work—essentially, those are phrases Paul regularly used to place an event without a precise date into a general timeframe.⁶ For instance, Paul introduces with ‘around that time’ (*circa hac tempore*) the Lombard sack of Monte Cassino—an event for which the known source, pope Gregory’s *Dialogues*, provides no chronology (*HL* 4.17, cf. Greg. *Dial.* 2.17). Likewise, Paul uses similar expressions to include information he obtained from the *Liber Pontificalis*, such as Romanus’s campaign south of the Po, which he dated somewhat correctly (*HL* 4.8 cf. *LP Vita Gregorii*, 66.2), and the usurpations of John of Consio and Eleutherius, which he misdated drastically (*HL* 4.34, dated before Heraclius, cf. *LP Vita Deusdedit* 70.2 [615–618] and *Vita Bonifati* 71.2 [619–25]). This group includes all the information about rebel dukes and most (but not all) of the information dealing with the Avars. It also includes Agilulf’s campaign south. The source for these undated entries is referred to here as segment ‘a’ of the ‘chronicle source II’ (‘chronicle source II^a’).

2 The exceptions are the date of the Lombard invasion, 568, which Paul copied from the *Origo*, and the date for the Lombard conquest of Milan, which he presumably found in the ‘consular source’; see Chapter 1.

3 The sources on Secundus are limited: Paul mentions him twice, once wondering why he did not mention the Lombard victory of 588 (*HL* 3.29), and later his death on May, 612, in which Paul notices that Secundus wrote a ‘succinct little history of the Lombards up to his days’ (*usque ad sua tempora succinctam de Langobardorum gestis composuit historiolum*) (*HL* 4.40). Gregory the Great wrote a letter (Greg. *Reg.* 14.12.) to a certain Secundulus, presumably Paul’s Secundus, who was living in the Lombard court in Milan and advocating tricapitoline ideas to the queen. Finally, a surviving few final lines attributed to a certain

‘Secundus servus Christi’, preserved in a twelfth-century manuscript, might be the *explicit* of Secundus’s work, published in *MGH SRL*, 25, n. 3; for the dating of the MS, see 25, n. 4. If those were actually the final lines from Secundus, that would place the end of his chronicle at some point between 579 and 580 (and thus explaining why Paul the Deacon found no reference to the Lombard victory in 588). On Secundus, see Jacobi 1877, 63–87, more recently, see Gardiner 1983; Pohl 1994; Everett 2003, 85–86; Zecchini 2009; Mores 2011, 256–71; Borri 2014, 43–45. The usual solution for the dating of Secundus’s death is to attribute it to a continuator, originally suggested by Jacobi 1877, 79, maintained by Gardiner 1983, 152.

- 4 A couple of recent articles have reclaimed the ‘legendary material’, esp. in Book 3, as coming from ‘Secundus of Trent’, see suggested in Hammer 2014, 252, and more fully developed in Garstad 2016, esp. 238–43, picking up from Bognetti 1967, 166–67. Benjamin Garstad suggests that the separation of ‘legendary’ and ‘chronicle’ material stems from the nineteenth-century clear-cut division of genre, and that there is nothing to preclude Secundus’s lost work from being a longer narrative, which would thus include much of the legendary material on Authari (especially) currently found in the *HL*. He misses the point: the idea that Secundus’s book was a chronicle of sorts stems from the short, dated entries in the *HL*, which coincide with Secundus’s time in court (see p. 126) but which are missing from the rest of the work; ‘legendary material’ is easily found elsewhere in the *HL*. I see no reason the thought-provoking Alexandrian echoes Garstad identifies in Authari’s story could not have come from Paul himself.
- 5 Of the passages with reference to date, general dating: *HL* 4.3, 4.5, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, 4.11, 4.12, 4.13, 4.14, 4.15, 4.17, 4.20, 4.21, 4.23, 4.24, 4.25, 4.31, 4.33, 4.34, 4.35, 4.37, 4.40, 4.41; precise dating: 3.30, 3.35, 4.2, 4.4, 4.10, 4.14, 4.16?, 4.27, 4.28, 4.29, 4.30, 4.32, 4.33, 4.40.
- 6 Instances of *his diebus* outside *HL* 3.35–4.41: 2.10, 2.32, 5.6, 5.31, 5.36, 6.15, 6.55; of *hac tempestate*: 5.5, 5.32, 6.9, 6.49.

The latter types of entry, the ones more precisely dated, seem to be quite accurate and, in the few examples where the dates can be checked, they are correct.⁷ This second group of entries must, however, be further divided in two subgroups. The first one includes a few entries in the beginning of Book 4, dealing mostly with weather in the eastern and northern part of the Po Valley. There was a severe drought from January to September in the year Agilulf became king (591), with an infestation of locusts in Trento, which recurred on the following year (*HL* 4.2); this next year the plague reached Veneto and Ravenna and the winter was severe (*HL* 4.4); in the following year there was a comet and John of Ravenna and the duke Euin of Trent died (*HL* 4.10)—one should also ascribe to this source *HL* 3.27, which deals with Euin, and the pro-tricapitoline *HL* 3.26. Apart from death of locally important figures, there is no political history, nor are there mentions of Agilulf or the Lombards.⁸ The source for this batch is called here ‘chronicle source II^b’.

The second batch, apart from a short notice on the passage of Halley’s comet (*HL* 4.32–33), contains no weather data. It includes the precise dating for Authari’s wedding and death (*HL* 3.30, 35) and the

two-rounds elevation of Agilulf (*HL* 3.35).⁹ After these regnal dates, it resumes from Adaloald's baptism (*HL* 4.27) on, bringing detailed accounts of political and military events. This source here is labeled 'chronicle source II^c'. *HL* 4.28 is the best example:

- 7 For instance, *HL* 4.10 mentions the death of bishop John of Ravenna in 593, confirmed by Greg. Reg. 5.21 (Feb. 593); the events on *HL* 4.27–28 and Greg. Reg. 14.12 (Dec. 603) are probably the best example.
- 8 *HL* 4.16, which mentions Ariulf's death, can be an exception, if it belongs to this batch. The dating, which should be 597 is, however, incorrect: Ariulf was still alive in 598 (Greg. Reg. 9.44 [Oct. 598]).
- 9 One should not, however, be misled by the precision of the relative dates in the *HL*. The 'chronicle source II' may have had a precise chronology of events, but those survive in Paul only in fragments. Thus, Paul preserved months and (sometimes) days, but references to years are mostly in a relative chronology ('this year', 'in the next year'). To make matters more complicated, Paul includes information between entries supposedly from the 'chronicle source II^c', and may have not accounted for all the years included in his source. There are three dates that provide an absolute chronology: the baptism of Adaloald happened in a year when Easter fell on April 7th (i.e., 603), a peace was celebrated until April 1st, in the eighth indiction (605), and a comet, Halley's, was seen (607) before a three-year peace.

Those days, there was a quarrel between the Lombards and the Romans on account of the captivity of the king's daughter. On account of that, king Agilulf left Milan in *June*, and sieged Cremona with the Slavs (which the Cagan, king of the Avars, sent to help). He took it on *August 21st* and razed it to the ground. In the same way, he assaulted Mantua and, having broken into the wall with battering rams, he invaded the city on *September 13th*, giving the soldiers he found there permission to return to Ravenna (...) peace was made in the ninth month [November?] until *April 1st of the eighth indiction* (605).

(*HL* 4.28, emphasis added)

Notice how, after the introduction that probably comes from 'II^a' ('those days'), the text assumes a terse but detailed account of the events—this passage figures among the most detailed accounts of a siege in the period (admittedly poorly served for military history).

The three segments of the 'chronicle source II' informed not only Paul on Agilulf, but also the *CH* and the *Origo*. The material Paul shared with the *CH*, a text Paul did not know, is easier to notice than the material shared with the *Origo*, on which he relied heavily. There is, nonetheless, a good amount of information that Paul brought directly from 'chronicle source II^a', which is absent from the *Origo*.¹⁰ The *Origo* and the *CH* used different selections of this source and, while the latter favored the 'chronicle source II^c', the former only used

the ‘chronicle source II^a’. Paul used the three sections, including material neither the *CH* nor the *Origo* used. The selection seems based on the kind of take each source wanted to give to Agilulf’s reign. Thus, while the *CH* emphasized Agilulf’s external campaigns towards the east and the *Origo* focused on his suppression of rebellion, Paul was interested in both sides of Agilulf’s reign.

What exactly the ‘chronicle source II’ was remains open to speculation. The three sections could have been three different works, to which the three surviving sources had access. Based on the material, it is likely that ‘chronicle source II^b’ was connected to Trento, which figures prominently in its entries, and might have been a continuation of the ‘consular source’ (which ended in 580)—if the latter was the work of Secundus, the former might have been a continuation either by Secundus himself or by a fellow monk. The ‘chronicle source II^c’, however, was certainly connected with the royal court, compiled after 602 and before the death of Agilulf in 615 (see pp. 134–35). It is tempting to see the three sections as part of a larger work in two installments, the first a work in progress connected to Secundus of Trent, comprising the ‘chronicle source II^b’, the second, a royal-sponsored project on the victorious campaigns of Agilulf from 602 onwards that added the II^c material, and, finally II^a, which formed a preface of a connecting text linking the two other segments—hence accounting for its less structured format. Although Secundus might have been somewhat involved in this final continuation of his earlier work—he was, after all, deeply involved in the Lombard court—it seems unlikely that he penned the last section of this work, given that his death is among the mentioned events. It may be that this work, in its final format, was presented to Agilulf at some point between 612 and 615, as presented (p. 134). Be as it may, the source material informing the surviving evidence seems to have been contemporary, even if tendentious towards Agilulf.

- 10 For instance, Paul knows of a few rebel dukes not mentioned by the *Origo*, such as Ulfari in Treviso (*HL* 4.3) and Warnecautius in Pavia (*HL* 4.13)—notice how the *Origo* signals to this material, mentioning a few dukes among ‘*alios qui revelles fuerunt*’. Paul also found in the ‘chronicle source II^a’ material about Agilulf’s campaign against Perusia (*HL* 4.8) and especially about the dealings with the Avars.

The king, the pope, and the rebels (590–602)

Authari died in September 5th 590, while the Lombards were negotiating the renewal of their agreement with the Franks (*HL*. 3.35). His death did not derail the peace talks, which, according to Gregory

of Tours, were brought to term by a mysterious ‘Paulus’, whom Gregory believed to be the new king, but who may have been the Lombard counterpart of the Frankish patrician (*Hist.* 10.3 [s.a. 590]).¹¹ The process of selection of the new king was expeditious and by November 590 the duke of Turin, a man named Agilulf (but also called Ago) was selected (*HL* 3.35).¹² Since Turin was at that point under Frankish control, it is likely that Agilulf was put forward by the Franks, or at least enjoyed their support.¹³ Paul, probably relying on the ‘chronicle source II’, reports of a negotiation led by Agnellus, the bishop of Trent, following the truce in the fall of 590, adding that at the same time Euin, the duke of Trent, brokered a new peace with the Franks (*HL* 4.1). It is probable that this negotiation also settled the choice of Agilulf as king, as well as his marriage to the recently widowed Theudelinda—the association of Theudelinda with the throne had been part of the 589 settlement (p. 100). which the negotiation in the winter of 590 aimed to reestablish. In May 591, Agilulf was officially proclaimed king to the Lombards in Milan (*HL* 3.35).

- 11 There is scarce evidence for a second-in-command behind the Lombard kings: there is certain Sundrarius, who commanded troops during Adaloald’s minority (*CH* 1554), and a certain Petrus, the son of (possibly the same) Paulus, mentioned in a commanding position in *Ep. Mer.* 2. *Contra* Schneider, who sees in ‘Paulus’ one of the contenders for the throne, Schneider 1972, 28. Frohlich (Frohlich 1980, 99–100) dismisses this as an error.
- 12 The *Origo*’s doubled ‘Acquo, dux *Turingus* de *Thaurinis*’ is probably a scribal mistake, as suggested already by Hartmann 1897b, 98, n. 4, cf. Frohlich 1980, 102. I favored *Thaurinis*, meaning he was the duke of *Turin*, which seems more context-appropriate, although it is not impossible that Agilulf was a Thuringian duke, transplanted into Italy; *Fred.* 4.13 states simply that ‘duke Ago was raised to king in Italy over the Lombards’; the *CH* says ‘after Authari, Agilulf also called Ago ruled the Lombards for 25 years’. There is also the possibility of a connection between Agilulf and the Frankish noble *gens Ayglofinga*, explored in Wagner 1978; Jarnut 1986; Frohlich 1980, 104.
- 13 For Turin, see Greg. *Reg.* 9.215, 227. *Contra* Verhoeve (2007, 3), who suggests the choice of a duke of Turin signals the need to counter the ongoing Frankish invasions.

While these negotiations were taking place, the imperial army was still in the eastern Po Valley. It was suggested in [Chapter 3](#) that the imperial mission in Italy was to secure the anti-Avar operations in the Danubian plains, and that the Franks had blocked any further penetration into the western Po Valley. Romanus finished the 590 campaign season in possession of key locations over the Po, isolating the Lombards north across the river. He also controlled Mantua at the gates of the western Po Valley (*Ep. Aust.* 40), commanding the segment of the *Via Postumia* (Aquileia–Genoa) linking the still

Lombard-controlled Verona to Cremona; he then captured the bridges over the river, namely, from east to west, Brixellum (Brescello), Cremona with the bridge in the *Via Postumia*,¹⁴ and finally Placentia (Piacenza) on the intersection between the *Via Postumia*, the *Via Aemillia* (Rimini–Piacenza), and the bridge across the Po towards Pavia (*Ep. Aust.* 41) (see [Map 3](#)). By late summer 590, while trying to convince the Frank to reengage, he reincorporated Parma and Reggio, further south on the *Via Aemillia*. The logic of his movements is clear: to build a cordon sanitaire around the western part of the Po Valley, and sprinkle the southward roads with military outposts. In the summer of 591, Romanus headed to Rome, from where he backtracked to Ravenna, reestablishing order in the cities on the way to secure the road. The *LP* preserves a list of the cities, naming ‘Sutrium (Sutri), Polimartium (Bomarzo), Hortas (Orte), Tudar (Todi), Ameria (Amelia), Perusia (Perugia), Luciolis (Cantiano) and many others’ (*Vita Gregorii*, 66.2).¹⁵ Most of these cities (Ameria, Tudar, Hortas) are connected with reestablishing a strong military position in Perugia, which was to serve as a center of operation in the years to follow (*Greg. Reg.* 5.36 [Jun 595]).

Further east, the war against the Avars proceeded as planned, and Maurice launched a large campaign in 592, moving a significant number of troops to the Danubian area (Kaegi 1981, 101–02). Although the incursions against the Avars were mostly successful, the Balkan theater became a hotbed of rebellions and unrest, mostly on account of an established tradition for insubordination combined with the strained imperial logistics (Kaegi 1981, 100–19). The first mutiny in this theater started in 593, when an (unusual) imperial order established that the entire booty of the campaign was to be distributed among the imperial family. The soldiers resented this, and it was only the commander Priscus’s rhetorical skills that prevented a full-scale rebellion (*Theo. Sim.* 6.7). By 594, Maurice issued a new form of payment, which replaced the money allowance for equipment with issues in kind, in practice reducing the soldiers’ paycheck to one-third of the previous values (supposedly compensated by supplying weapons and clothes) (Jones 1964a, 314, Kaegi 1981, 106–07). The new pay scale, combined with Maurice’s insistence on having the soldiers wintering north of the Danube, festered the bitterness of the soldiers into a large rebellion, which cost Maurice his life in 602 (Kaegi 1981, 110–18; Whitby 1988, 165–69). The conditions of the imperial army in the Danube were not unlike that of the 568 army in Italy: a dangerous combination of ineffective logistics, restricted budget, and a culture of insubordination.

¹⁴ Brescello and Cremona were likely in imperial hands since they were later

conquered by Agilulf (CH, 1544).

- 15 Romanus's campaign should be placed early in the summer 591, since Perugia is already attested in imperial hands in July 591 (Greg. Reg. 1.58).

Lombard rebellion redux

Did the Italian troops under Romanus partake in this new wave of military discontent? The narrative sources are silent, but some evidence from pope Gregory's letters suggests they did.¹⁶ Already in 590, Gregory was concerned about the mood of the troops in Rome, and he longed for the arrival of Maurentius, a *chartularius*, probably carrying the soldiers' wages. '[B]ecause outside we are cut down without a rest by the enemy swords', bemoaned the pope, 'but inside we are more seriously threatened by risk of the mutiny of the soldiers' (Greg. Reg. 1.3 [Sept. 590]). Gregory was right to be concerned: by the summer of 592, he was besieged by a large rebelling army, with little hope of rescue from Ravenna. The sequence of events that led to that tragic summer is unclear, and much depends on putting together disconnected notes from Gregory's correspondence. The essence of this material can be summarized thus: in September 591, Gregory sent a letter to *magister militum* Velox advising him on chasing Ariulf, who was at that point between Rome and Ravenna, probably in the *Via Flaminia*. The letter refers to Ariulf as the 'nec dicendum Ariulfum', roughly translated as 'Ariulf, who should not be talked about', a strange turn of phrase that suggests Ariulf should be avoided as a topic (Reg. 2.4 [Sept. 27th 591]).¹⁷ Gregory also asked that a few hostages from the families of Aloin, Andobin, and Ingildus Grusingus, held by another *magister militum*, Maurice, should be released, so they could join their relative in Rome (Reg. 2.4). In the next year, Ariulf, still at large, contacted the pope with news—yet to be confirmed by June—that the city of Soana had turned to his side; Ariulf was then bivouacking in Narni, a city in the fork of the *Via Flaminia* with a considerable 'Lombard' population.¹⁸ Gregory felt confident the troops in Rome could defend the city, but called for the *magister militum* Maurice to intervene if possible (Greg. Reg. 2.27–28 [June 592]). About the same time, Gregory sent a letter to the troops in Naples praising and exhorting obedience—this suggests that this particular virtue, which he called the 'highest military glory' (*summa militiae laus*), may have been lacking further south (Reg. 2.47 [Sept. 591–Aug. 592]). By July, Ariulf had marched to Rome. At that point Gregory wrote a desperate letter to John, the bishop of Ravenna, pleading for him to intervene with Romanus. He claimed that Ariulf came to Rome 'killing some men and maiming others', and the exarch, while 'pretending to fight our enemies', forbade Gregory from negotiating

with them. Such mediation, Gregory proceeds, was hindered by the fact that Ariulf now had both the army commanded by Auctarit and the one commanded by Nordulf, and had stated that there would be no peace talk until they received their *precaria* (*Reg.* 2.38 [July 592]). The defenses of Rome were also compromised, since Romanus had moved some troops north (probably to Perugia) (cf. *Reg.* 5.36 [June 595]), while the Theodosian legion, which remained behind, was left without pay (*Reg.* 2.38). To further complicate the situation, Arogis had ‘turned against the faith of the Republic’ and was then blockading Naples (*Reg.* 2.38). The letter also suggests there was more violence in Venetia, where the city of Fano (close to Gradus) had been attacked. There is no further reference to this crisis in the letters, and the reader is left wondering how it was resolved.¹⁹

- 16 There is a vast amount of scholarship on Gregory the Great. See, especially, Demacopoulos 2015, and the articles collected in: Richards 2014; Neil and Dal Santo 2013; Moorhead 2005; Martyn 2003; Markus 1997; Straw 1988. On Gregory’s *Registrum* and the composition of the letters, see; Pollard 2013, following Norberg 1980.
- 17 Martyn (2004, 1:195) translates the odd ‘nec dicendum’ as ‘unmentionable’, which is not incorrect, although it should probably not be taken as ‘infandus’, that is, ‘unmentionable’ in the sense of abominable, but as ‘what should not be said’; it might refer to his status as a rebel, as argued .
- 18 Lombards in Narni: *Greg. Reg.* 2.2 (Sept. 591).
- 19 Gregory remembered some of those events in 595, in *Greg. Reg.* 5.36, see pp. 123–25.

Some of the characters involved in this story are big names in Lombard history, mainly Arogis and Ariulf, whom Paul makes the second generation of dukes of Benevento (*HL* 4.18, 19, 44) and Spoleto (*HL* 4.16). Scholars have followed suit, seeing the unrest in the early 590s as the consolidation of the two southern duchies.²⁰ The evidence preserved by Gregory, however, hints instead at a large-scale military uprising in southern Italy—a reading Bognetti has already suggested in the past.²¹ A few points confirm this reading. First, Gregory attests clearly the ongoing arrays and the pervading fear of sedition (*Greg. Reg.* 1.3, 2.38, 2.47). Second, Gregory was not, by then, claiming Ariulf or Arogis were Lombards or suggesting any involvement of the Lombard king in Pavia. On the contrary, Arogis is clearly said to have ‘turned against the faith of the Republic’ (*Reg.* 2.38). Finally, Ariulf was commanding imperial troops—Gregory clearly states the troops from Nordulf’s and Autharit’s armies were following him. Nordulf came to Italy with reinforcements to Romanus for the 591 campaign (*Ep. Aust.* 41), while Auctarit is most likely the ‘Authari’ who abandoned the Lombards for the empire after the election of king Authari (*Fred.* 4.45, p. 81). Those were imperial

commanders leading imperial troops in 591 and, although it can be argued Auctarit's troops were originally 'Lombards' (i.e., troops belonging to the rebel 568 army), that was most likely not the case for Nordulf's troops, which belong to Romanus's 590 army. Even Ariulf had a record in the imperial army in the East: in the early 580s, he fought the Persians between the Tigris and the Nymphius (Batman, in modern Turkey), under the *magister militum* Iohannis Mistacon (Theo. Sim. 1.9.7–9). Thus, all the major players involved were firmly connected, at one point or another, to the imperial army.

A possible way to account for the evidence runs as follow. As argued in the last chapter, in 589–90 Romanus commanded a large army to Italy in order to gain control of Friuli and pacify the peninsula (*Ep. Aust.* 40–41). In early summer 591, Romanus turned south to secure the way between Rome and Ravenna. It is possible that he was seizing the chance to use the expeditionary force to pacify the region before the bulk of the troops were sent back to the Balkans for the Avar campaign, which happened in 593.²² That was when problems started. While the army was in the *Via Flaminia* north of Rome, Ariulf rebelled, probably with a few units of the army. Among the reasons that pushed the rebellion is certainly arrears, the payment of which Ariulf demanded in the following year (*Greg. Reg.* 2.38). There may have been other reasons, including the looming threat to be moved to the bleak Danubian front to fight the Avars and the new policies concerning loot (see p. 114). Ariulf's rebellion might be why Gregory refers to him as a man 'one should not talk about' (*Greg. Reg.* 2.4 [Sept. 27th 591]), given that news of the rebellion could incite further insubordination. In September, Gregory was troubled about the forces controlled by Ariulf north of Rome, even if the problem seemed to be under control. Gregory advised Velox to contain him in case he attempted to make a sally (*excurrere*) against Rome or Ravenna. Three loyalist *magistri militum*, Velox, Vitalian, and Maurice, were in the region. Maurice had indeed managed to capture a few hostages, but the pope attested they had nothing to do with Ariulf and should be released (*Reg.* 2.4). In the next year, Ariulf clashed with imperial troops, possibly successfully, and moved his army to the mountains towards Etruria.²³ By June 592, the imperial troops were rendezvousing around Perugia, while Ariulf's troops maneuvered nearby. On June 11th, Ariulf sent a letter to Gregory, probably from Soana in Etruria, whose text did not survive (*Reg.* 2.28 [June 592]).²⁴ It seems, however, that Ariulf's letter brought an ultimatum to Gregory, since the pope also reported to Maurice that Ariulf's troops were in Narni and might be heading to Rome (*Reg.* 2.28).

had access to Gregory's letters (Fabbro 2015). For the traditional reading, see, on Benevento, Capo 2003; Gasparri 1988; on Spoleto, Bognetti 1966b; Gasparri 1983. For the earlier dukes, see Gasparri 1978, 73–74 (Spoleto), 86–87 (Benevento).

- 21 Bognetti's very imaginative reconstruction of the context, however, found fewer echoes in scholarship: Bognetti 1966b; Gasparri 1983, 1988, cf. Wickham 1981, 31–32.
- 22 Most of the resources amassed in the Balkans in 591–92 were probably coming from Asia, but it is likely that the army in nearby Italy was also moved (Kaegi 1981, 102; Whitby 1988, 158).
- 23 In June 592, Gregory wrote again to the *magistri militum* in the region, expressing his relief when he found they were safe: notice also that Velox, to whom Gregory had addressed the previous letter, is no longer mentioned (Greg. Reg. 2.27).
- 24 Triggering Gregory's suspicions that the citizens of Soana were supporting Ariulf; he asked for the *mag. mil.* Maurice to check.

The showdown between Gregory and Ariulf happened in the following month, when Ariulf marched to Rome. Either he defeated Maurice and Vitalian or, more likely, their troops rebelled and joined his.²⁵ One thing is for certain: at that point Ariulf was commanding troops from two other commanders, Nordulf and Auctarit (Reg. 2.38).²⁶ At the same time, yet another commander, Arogis, probably stationed in the *Via Appia* (Rome–Appulia), joined Ariulf—Gregory's concerns about the loyalty of the troops in Naples a few month earlier turned out to be correct. Arogis joined the pressure on the imperial government by blockading Naples (Reg. 2.38). Sieging Rome, Ariulf entered into negotiations, with the condition that his soldiers would receive their *precaria*, a term likely connected to military rewards (Reg. 2.38).²⁷ Gregory desperately needed Romanus to negotiate a truce, or at least to allow him to do so. Romanus, however, would have none of it, understandably so: if he were to accede to mutinous soldiers' demands, what would prevent the rest of the army from rebelling? Nonetheless, Gregory despised the man ever after, whom he once labeled as worse than the Lombards (Reg. 2.38, 5.6 [Sept. 594]); the quotation is from 5.40 [June 595]). There is no information on how the crisis was resolved. Years later, Gregory's dealings with Ariulf and Agilulf were closely scrutinized, and from the accusations leveled against him, it seems he came to terms with Ariulf in 592, probably involving some monetary incentive, in the belief that the rebel was willing to return to imperial service (which turned out to be false; Reg. 5.36 [June 595]). The threat posed by Ariulf and Arogis was, nonetheless, not defused, and the two commanders maintained troops blocking two main arteries in the Italian communication system, Ariulf in the *Via Flaminia*, Arogis in the *Via Appia*, although probably not from Benevento and certainly not from Spoleto.²⁸

- 25 There are no further references to Vitalian, who may have been killed in this encounter; Maurice may have shared the same fate, unless he is the Maurisio in *HL* 4.8 (see pp. 120–21, n. 34). For the two commanders, see PLRE, 3.2; Mauritius 2, 854–5; Vitalian 3, 1379–80.
- 26 Nordulf was in all likelihood not personally involved, since he was still well esteemed by the emperor a few years later (Greg. *Reg.* 5.36 [June 595]); there is no further evidence for Auctarit.
- 27 *Precaria* can mean a number of things. Gregory mentions *Precarium* in three other letters (Greg. *Reg.* 9.132, 9.134, and 10.8), in all cases referring to a certain form of income granted by a special dispensation from Ravenna (which Gregory calls *capitular*, and the *Lib. Iud.* 10.1.12 *precaria epistula*), different thus from regular payments, usually called *stipendium*, *donatio* or, more rarely, *roga*. Isidore defines *precarium* as a property that remains in possession of the ‘creditor’ but whose production is granted to the ‘debtor’ by a plea (hence, *precarium*, from *precor*), see *Etymologiae*, 5.25.17 (cf. *Lib. Iud.* 10.1.12), a definition not unlike that used in Roman legal vocabulary, see Iust. *Dig.* 43.26.1 (compare with *Edictum Theodorici*). Although the precise definition is hard to pin down, the context is certainly *not* that which ‘alle Führer der Völkerwanderung’ demanded, as wants Christou 1991, 147.
- 28 Gregory’s letter to the bishop Chrysantus of Spoleto never shows any evidence of occupation, see Greg. *Reg.* 9.49, 59, 108, 167, 13.36, 37, nor in the one letter that refers to the city, 9.88. There are no letters to Benevento.

The king and the dukes

Meanwhile, the Lombard king Agilulf was primarily concerned with securing his position north of the Po: his starting point was the still precarious arrangement left by Authari, who was fully recognized as (a satellite) king by the Franks, but whose influence in his own kingdom was somewhat limited. The period between 590 and 602 falls into the information Paul acquired from the earlier segment of ‘chronicle source II’, and thus there are fewer chronological markers. It is clear, however, that once in power, Agilulf strove to solidify his position in the kingdom and weather Romanus’s supremacy across the Adige. This consolidation involved two different policies, first internally, suppressing the rebel dukes in the western Po Valley, and then externally, linking with the Avars against the imperial forces.

To secure his position as king—and the existence of the monarchy in the long run—Agilulf had to first impose his authority over the dukes. Paolo Delogu has rightly suggested that Agilulf was remembered as the king who fought down the rebel dukes (Delogu 1980, 37; 2009, 254). Although Authari probably left a loosely tied internal structure, he also left an effective army, assembled in the final years of his rule. The campaigns against the dukes were preserved in the ‘chronicle source II^a’, used by both the *HL* and the *Origo*. By favoring the accomplishment of the early part of Agilulf’s reign, the *Origo* chose to celebrate Agilulf as the king who brought down the

dukes:

And came the 'Thuringian' Agilulf, duke of Turin, who married queen Theudelinda, and was made king of the Lombards. He killed the Lombard dukes who had rebelled, Zangrof of Verona, Mimulf of the island of St. Giuliano, Gaidulf of Bergamo and also other rebels.

(*Origo*, c. 6)²⁹

Paul the Deacon makes a similar evaluation, presenting a similar list of rebel dukes:

In those days, king Agilulf killed duke Mimulf of the island of St. Giuliano, because formerly he had surrendered to the Frankish dukes. Gaidulf of Bergamo, however, rebelled in his city, and fortified himself against the king, but, after exchanging hostages, made peace with him. But again, Gaidulf confined himself in the island of Comacina. But king Agilulf entered that island, expelled Gaidulf's men and found the treasure the Romans had stored there, which he then moved to Pavia. Gaidulf, however, fled again to Bergamo, where he was snatched by Agilulf, but was once again returned to royal favor. Duke Ulfari, who also rebelled against king Agilulf in Treviso, was besieged and captured by the king.

(*HL* 4.3)

Paul probably misplaced the reference to Ulfari. The duke was still in control of Treviso (and serving the empire) in 598; Agilulf probably confronted him only later in 602 (Greg. Reg. 9.161).³⁰ Agilulf seems to be tackling resistance in the access points to the Alps. In this first round of operations he dealt with dukes in a c.125 km radius from Milan, which was probably as far as royal control went in the aftermath of the death of Authari. The submission of the duke of Pavia, which Paul mentions later in the *HL*, should probably be added to this earlier period (*HL* 4.13).

The consolidation of Agilulf's power also involved creating ties with the Avars. Paul mentions four events of negotiations and treaties between the Avars and Agilulf (*HL* 4.4, 12, 20, 24), and, although the chronology is hard to reconstruct, it attests for the building up of a close alliance. Later in his reign, Agilulf was able to use Avars and Slavs in Italy, likely as allied forces (*HL* 4.28, 40; possibly, 4.37). Linking up with the Avars in the Balkans was a clever solution to counter Romanus's control of Veneto and Istria. In the previous chapter, it was argued that Romanus aimed at encircling the Avars by creating a new front to their west, and to do so Romanus coopted Gisulf of Friuli into the imperial ranks (see p. 83; 106). a configuration that successfully pinned down the Avars during the imperial campaigns in 593–95 and possibly again in 597–602 (on the

campaigns, Whitby 1988, 156–66). It is safe to assume the Avars wanted to break down the imperial threat to their flank, and an alliance with Agilulf against Romanus was for them also quite desirable. During the 590s, however, the Avars were facing the relentless pounding of the imperial forces in the region, and there was little they could do to support Agilulf in Italy. Agilulf's military activities, nonetheless, consumed imperial resources in northern Italy, reducing what was available for the Danubian campaign. This link between the Avars and Milan may have had, however, an unforeseeable consequence. Concerned with the growing cooperation between Agilulf and the Avars, Romanus arguably strengthened his links with Gisulf in Friuli and the communities in northeastern Italy. As a result, the imperial authorities shielded the tricapitoline churches in Venetia and Istria, to the point of drafting an imperial dictum preventing proselytism towards tricapitoline believers (Greg. *Reg.* 9.156 [May 599]). Although this stance seems to have softened with the next exarch, Callinicus, throughout all Gregory's papacy the position of the court in Ravenna remained one of mediation, not suppression.³¹ This need to compromise in the religious policy in the northeast further strained Gregory's relationship with the exarch (and especially with Romanus), opening the way to a rapprochement between Rome and the Lombard court in Milan.

29 On the *Origo*, see pp. 152–53 on the supposed Thuringian origin of Agilulf, see n. 12.

30 That is, if Paul's Ulfari is the same person as Gregory's Gulfarius, as in Jarnut 1972, 376–77, cf. Gasparri 1978, 63.

31 For Gregory's position, see *Reg.* 2.43 (July 592); on imperial dealings with tricapitolines, see *Reg.* 9.142, 9.153, 9.155, 9.156.

The road that leads to Rome

Once secure in the north, Agilulf captured Piacenza (obtaining one of the bridges across the Po) and Parma,³² paving the way to a second round of campaigns, now towards Rome. It is hard to know why Agilulf moved south so soon, while so much of the north still lay outside his control, and it has been suggested that he did so to confront dukes Ariulf and Arogis, whose control of military assets in the south was growing progressively (Gasparri 1988, 83). Paul correctly places this incursion after Romanus's southern expedition (591–92) (*HL* 4.18), but it was only in the summer of 593 that Agilulf crossed the Po.³³ This campaign southward was recorded in the 'chronicle source II^a' and informed both the *CH* and Paul, as shown in Table 4.1.

CH 1545

Finally, [Agilulf] *set forth* to besiege Rome *with all strength of the army*. There he found the blessed Gregory, who then splendidly ruled the Church, who rushed down the steps of the basilica of blessed Peter, prince of the Apostles, to meet the king. Softened by his prayers and moved by his wisdom and the *gravitas* of the religiosity of such man, the king retreated from the siege of the city. *Carrying however what he had captured, journeying back, he withdraw* to Milan.

HL 4.8

When that [i.e., Romanus's campaigns] was announced to king Agilulf, *he immediately marched from Pavia* to attack Perugia, *with a powerful army*. There, he sieged for a few days Maurisio, a duke of the Lombards who had changed sides to the Romans, and without delay he captured and killed him. The approach of the king had terrified pope Gregory so much that he desisted from his commentary on the temple mentioned in Ezekiel, as he mentions in his homilies. *The king Agilulf, gathering the things [he had captured], returned* to Pavia. Not long after that, on the suggestion of his wife, queen Theudelinda, just as the blessed pope Gregory often admonished in letter, Agilulf agreed upon the most enduring peace with the pope and the Romans.

Paul likely found 'duke Maurisio' in the 'chronicle source II^a' section, together with the campaign against rebel dukes, and thus portrayed him as one of them. Maurisio, however, was most likely the same military commander Gregory contacted during the Ariulf affair, who, after being defeated by Agilulf, remained in control of the imperial troops in the region (HL 4.8).³⁴ Paul places him in Perugia, where Romanus had built a hub to defend the access to Rome. Thus, Agilulf sieged the city, defeating the forces Romanus had moved there from Rome (to Gregory's despair) (Greg. Reg. 5.36 [June 595]). He did not occupy the city, since Perugia was still in Byzantine control in 599 (Reg. 9.117). With the troops in Perugia destroyed, there was nothing Romanus could do to prevent Agilulf from marching to Rome.

32 Both later on in Lombard hands, see Hartmann 1897a, 105; Christou 1991, 146; Delogu 1980, 36–37. Of the two cities, Parma is the only one mentioned by Paul (HL 4.20); Piacenza, however, is on the route between the then capital in Milan and Parma.

33 The dating depends on the (admittedly speculative) dating for the siege of Rome; see n. 35.

34 It is possible that Paul's Maurisius is the same person as Mauricius, a military commander contacted three times by Gregory (Reg. 2.4, 27, 28): the circumstantial evidence in the letters might connect him with Lombards (as Gregory associates him with a group of men—Aloin, Andobin and Ingildus Grusingus—who had surrendered hostages to the Roman authorities, Reg. 2.4) and suggest Mauricius was stationed somewhere around Perugia (as a certain *vir gloriosus* Aldio, associated with the diocese of Perugia [in Reg. 9.103] brought news to Gregory concerning Maurice [Reg. 2.27]).

The siege of Rome is reported by the *CH*, which here relies on the same passage from the ‘chronicle source II’ used in *HL* 4.8. The dating is uncertain, but in a letter from November 594, Gregory mentions to a recent period when Rome was cut off from Ravenna, which suggests the siege possibly happened between the winter of 593 and early 594 (Greg. *Reg.* 5.15 [Nov. 594]).³⁵ The *HL*, however, glosses over the confrontation between Gregory and Agilulf, and replaces it with a snippet from another work by Gregory in which the pope claims fear of the Lombards had prevented him from finishing his work earlier (Greg. *In Ezic.* 2, preaf). For Paul, Agilulf returned to Pavia (and not Milan) after his conquests, and only then did the pope, with the help of Theudelinda, convince him to restore peace (*HL* 4.8). One can easily imagine that, for Paul and his Carolingian sponsor, Lombard kings successfully restoring peace and unity by attacking Rome was not especially acceptable.

³⁵ The dating of the siege is nonetheless problematic, since Gregory’s letters are never candid about the event. The siege happened after Castus came to Rome, hence, after July 593 (Greg. *Reg.* 3.51[July 593], and probably before November 594, when Gregory mentions a period in which Rome was cut off from Ravenna (Reg. 5.15). There is a gap in letters from December 593 to February 594, which might be connected to that; see Hartmann, *MGH Ep.* 1.1, 319; 1897b, 105, cf. Weise 1887, 178–80 (for June 593). Hodgkin gives a still useful summary of traditional positions in 1885, vol. 5, 368, n. 3. The question of the dating of the siege has received little attention in recent works (e.g., Delogu 1980, 37; Jarnut 1982, 44). The main source for the siege is Gregory’s letter to Maurice, from 595 (Reg. 5.36), which does not date the event precisely.

The *CH*, however, had no qualms in reporting the king’s victory, and also suggests that an annual tribute—five *centenaria* of gold (36,000 *solidi*)—was arranged with the pope (*CH.* 1554). The details about the interaction between Agilulf and Gregory remain illusive, although they certainly bring to mind the embassy of Leo I to Attila, which the *CH* probably referenced in the story.³⁶ Be that as it may, the meeting in Rome opened the doors for a closer interaction between the pope and the court in Milan. In his report of the peace, Paul the Deacon suggests that Agilulf returned the properties to the Church, which might imply that the arrangement between Agilulf and Gregory involved the recognition of ecclesiastical property in the lands now controlled by the Lombards (*HL* 4.6).³⁷ Whether Gregory prompted Agilulf to approach Rome in the first place, or improvised when the king appeared outside its walls, is open to speculation, but what he agreed with Agilulf certainly changed the game in southern Italy. Given the clear change in posture of the pope towards Agilulf and the king’s new approach towards the properties of the Church, it could be suggested that Agilulf moved towards Rome not only to

intimidate the Byzantine city, but also to come to terms with the pope. Conversely, Gregory would later hold Agilulf responsible for the misdeeds of the rebel dukes in the south (although Ariulf and Arogis were not too eager to comply, *Greg. Reg.* 9.66 [598]). The relationship of the Lombards with the Church in Rome would continue to be stable until the eighth century (Noble 1984, 23–39). On his front, Agilulf gained a significant victory over the Byzantine authorities, and, more importantly, took a fundamental step towards normalizing the relationship with the churches in northern Italy. In addition to that, he secured with the new tribute a significant income for his war chest, a part of which presumably went to the troops.

Gregory, the simpleton

The actions of the pope were not well received in Constantinople. By mid-595, the Avar campaign had calmed down, and the region was in peace well into the next year (*Theo. Sim.* 7.12.9; Whitby 1988, 161–62), which allowed imperial authorities to turn their gaze onto what had been happening in Italy. An investigation was set up in 595, and in the summer, Gregory wrote a letter to the emperor to justify his behavior in the previous years (*Greg. Reg.* 5.36; Markus 1997, 104–06; Dal Santo 2013, 74–75; Neil 2013, 23–24). The ‘imperial commands’, whose details emerge only obliquely from Gregory’s letter, investigated the recent dealings of the pope with the enemies of the empire. Following what probably started as a report from Nordulf (the military commander whose troops had defected to Ariulf) and a certain Leo (governor of Sicily?), the imperial authorities became suspicious first of Gregory’s dealings with Ariulf in 592, done over Romanus’s head, and then of his conduct during the siege of 593–94. Gregory, the letter suggests, had claimed he negotiated with Ariulf because the rebel was willing to rejoin the empire (which never actually materialized). The emperor chastised the pope, whom he called a ‘simpleton’ (*fatuus*), and suspected Ariulf’s good intentions were simply a ruse the pope had concocted to justify his shady dealings with the rebel commander. In his reply, Gregory turned the emperor’s offense on itself, listing biblical citations praising simplicity (*Reg.* 5.36, quoting *Iob* 1:1; *Rom* 16:19; *Math.* 10:16). In scripture, he claimed, ‘simplicity’ is often associated with prudence and rightfulness. But the emperor ‘denounced him a simpleton without mentioning his prudence’, when he was deceived by Ariulf’s craftiness. ‘Were I not a “simpleton”,’ grumbled Gregory, ‘I would not come to bear all those things that I suffer in this place under the swords of the Lombards’ (*Reg.* 5.36). And now, he continued, he was under suspicion because Ariulf did not follow through on his promise, as

though he, Gregory, was the one to have committed perjury. Gregory was nonetheless not concerned for himself, he claimed, but for his land, whose captivity increased every day. He continued: he has suffered worst slights. He then took the liberty to enumerate them:

36 Already suggested by Hartmann, in a note on *Greg. Reg.* 5.36 (in the MGH, Ep. I, 319, n. 2), cf. *LP*, *Vita Leonis*, 47.7.

37 The entry, however, is not dated, and finds no confirmation in contemporary sources; cf. Mor 1930; Delogu 1980, 40–41; 2009, 255.

First, the peace, which I had made, without any cost for the Republic, with the Lombards stationed in Tuscia, was taken away from me. Then, with the peace broken, the soldiers were removed from the city of Rome, and some were indeed killed by the enemy, but the others were placed in Narni and Perugia; and so that Perugia might be held, Rome was abandoned. After that, a heavier blow was the arrival of Agilulf, so much so that with my own eyes I saw Romans bound with ropes round their necks, just like dogs, as they were led to Francia for sale. And because we who were inside the city escaped his hands with God's protection, it was asked why the grain, which can in no way be preserved in this city for long in large quantity (as I have described more fully in another recommendation), has run out—for which we are apparently to be blamed.

(*Reg.* 5.36)

Gregory was not the only one accused of poor handling of the city during the siege. The imperial officials responsible for the provision of Rome, both the prefect of Rome (also called Gregory) and the *magister militum* Castus, were also being investigated for their behavior, accused of negligence during the attack. According to Gregory:

But I was distressed to no small degree concerning those men of glorious rank, the praetorian prefect Gregory and the *magister militum* Castus, who in no way neglected to do everything that could possibly be done, and they endured the most exhausting labors of keeping watch and guarding the city in that siege, and after all of this, they were shattered by the heavy indignation of their Lordship. Considering them, I clearly understand that it is not their actions that condemn them, but my person, with whom, because they toiled together in distress, after their toil they have to be similarly distressed.

(*Reg.* 5.36)

Gregory did not go into the details of the siege, or what exactly the emperor was condemning in both his response and that of the local imperial authorities. Taking the *CH* into account, however, the picture

becomes clearer. Agilulf defeated Romanus and sieged Rome. Gregory, it seems, did not oppose Agilulf, but instead, although without an official mandate to do so, he surrendered the city to Agilulf and asked for terms. The odd reference in Gregory's letter about his mishandling of the food supply for the city may be related to this hastened surrender: did Gregory claim the city ran out of provision as an excuse to negotiate with Agilulf? Whatever the case, Gregory stepped out of his attributions and negotiated with the king not only a truce but also a yearly tribute.³⁸ A regular tribute certainly left an air of capitulation—which is likely how Agilulf understood it (see pp. 133–34). All this negotiation could be nothing but suspicious to the imperial authorities (Azzara 1991, 29; Mores 2011, 231–32).³⁹ In his letter, the bishop of Rome brushed it all off as attending to the needs of the day, and in another letter to the emperor in the same batch, he blamed all the current tribulations on the uncanonical title the bishop of Constantinople decided to parade (*Reg.* 5.37 [June 595]). Again, the letters provide no information on the outcomes of the imperial investigation. The pope evidently evaded prosecution, but Castus, the military commander, seems to have lost his job (*Reg.* 5.36 is the last reference to him).

³⁸ Notice the demand for cash in a letter to the empress, carried by the same embassy that brought Maurice Gregory's justifications (*Greg. Reg.* 5.39).

³⁹ The accusations of murder in *Greg. Reg.* 5.6 are another sign of the strained relations between the imperial forces and the pope.

***'I was made bishop not of Romans but of Lombards'*⁴⁰**

Although Gregory made it seem that he acted with Agilulf on the spur of the moment, there is evidence the king's agreeable reception in Rome had been in preparation for a long time.⁴¹ In a letter from September 593, Gregory already showed he was open to striking a unilateral deal with Agilulf. Writing to Constantius, the bishop of Milan (then in Genoa), Gregory inquired about the king's diplomatic dealings with the Franks, and asked the bishop to investigate whether Agilulf was negotiating in any way with the exarch Romanus. If not, Gregory suggested the bishop should let the king know he was willing to apply himself to 'his cause' (*causa eius*). After the siege, the pope was always a strong supporter of peaceful negotiations with the Lombard kingdom in the north (*Greg. Reg.* 4.33, 34, 36; Azzara 1991, 13–16). By May 595, it is clear that Gregory had come to a closer agreement with Agilulf, which the king was willing to extend to the rest of the peninsula. In a letter to Ravenna, Gregory suggested that Agilulf agree to a general peace (*generalis pax*), as long as the exarch

respected it. The king complained that the exarch had violated the truce, probably referring to the truce he and the pope agreed upon in 594. If the exarch did not want to comply, Agilulf was willing to negotiate a peace with the Apostolic see alone (*Reg.* 5.34).

In 595, Gregory had more to worry about than the imperial inquiry and the strained relations with Agilulf. Conditions were again deteriorating in the south. Whatever agreement the pope struck with Ariulf and Arogis was no longer holding, and the rebel leaders were raiding the land in search for loot. Again, the information comes obliquely from the Gregory's letters. From summer 595 on, Arogis started to raid Campania, causing much destruction to the entire region.⁴² There was also the risk of the attacks spreading to the islands (*Reg.* 5.34 [May 595], 6.33 [April 596]). Sicily was, as far as the epistolary reveals, safe, but there had been problems in the other two main islands. Sardinia was threatened by raids, not only from the anti-imperial forces on the continent, but also by the *barbaricini*, a pagan population in the island (*Reg.* 4.25, 27 [May 594], 9.124 [Feb.–Apr. 599]). Gregory's letters attest not only attacks, but also the pope's concern with the upkeep of the defenses in the island (*Reg.* 9.9 [Sept.–Oct. 598]), 9.196 [July 599] resp.). In Corsica, Gregory complained that the high taxes were driving the landowners to join the Lombards (*Reg.* 5.38 [June 595]). The exact nature of these attacks is impossible to fathom: Arogis, who was operating further south, is the most likely culprit, but the raids in Sardinia may also have come from Agilulf or Ariulf. They may as well have come from homebred 'Lombards', as was the case in Corsica. Be it as it may, the safety of the Church's patrimony, which was held significantly in southern Italy and the islands, was among Gregory's main concerns.⁴³ Among the forces operating in Italy, the unlikely savior Agilulf was still the most likely candidate to defend the Church.

⁴⁰ *Greg. Reg.* 1.30 (Feb 591).

⁴¹ For the scholarship on Gregory and the Lombards, see Azzara 1991; Markus 1997, 97–107; Pohl 1997a, 75–77, 103–12; Martyn 2004, 1: 30–32; Müller 2009, 182–85, 281–85, 314–18; Ricci 2013, 32–42.

⁴² In September, Arogis was controlling the countryside around Naples, in the neighborhood of Volturmo (*Greg. Reg.* 6.11 [Sept. 595]); in 596 Gregory is lamenting the 'calamity' (*calamitas*) that took the region (*Reg.* 6.32 [April 596]); Basil, the bishop of Capua, was possibly dislocated to Syracuse (*Reg.* 9.73 [Nov.–Dec. 598]).

⁴³ For the Church holdings in Sicily, see Spearing and Simpson 1918, 1–20; Martyn 2004, 1:24–29, 91–94.

Thus, Gregory could not afford to allow the imperial suspicions to hinder his contacts with Milan.⁴⁴ In 596, a certain Secundus, whom Gregory calls monk and abbot, had become an important middleman,

brokering the peace talks between Milan, the pope, and the imperial authorities in Ravenna—it is tempting to see in this person the Secundus of Trent mentioned in the *HL*. The monk, a moderate defender of the ‘Three Chapters’, became a closer adviser to Theudelinda, who in turn had close access to the king (*HL* 4.27, *Greg. Reg.* 9.148 [May 599], 14.12 [Dec. 603]). During that year, Secundus was moving between Ravenna, Rome, and Milan, working with Gregory towards a general peace (*Reg.* 6.33 [April 596]). Secundus’s efforts were probably helped by the death of Romanus, early in 596 (and certainly before April 597).⁴⁵ The exarch had been a staunch defender of a military solution—a normalization of the relations with Agilulf could compromise the condition of the units in Veneto that had turned to the empire in 590. The new exarch, Callinicus, although less opposed to peace talks, was soon involved in clashes with the Lombards in the Po Valley in 596–97.

It was only in 598 that Gregory managed to broker a general peace (*Reg.* 9.44, 9.66, 9.68 [Oct. 598]).⁴⁶ Callinicus possibly found himself unable to push further into the Po Valley. Early in the summer, the empire was preparing a new campaign against the Avars and a general peace in Italy would certainly benefit the imperial war efforts (Whitby 1988, 163–64; Goubert 1951b, 107–08). Finding terms to which all the parts involved agreed was, nonetheless, not a simple task. Gregory’s epistolary material reveals some of the many complications in the process. The negotiation involved bringing to the table four groups with quite different interests: the court in Milan, the court in Ravenna, the pope in Rome, and the southern rebels Ariulf and Arogis. Gregory wanted a peace between Agilulf and the empire, but he also wanted the king to hold Ariulf and Arogis accountable. Ariulf, however, did not accept this package deal, nor did he seem to recognize any connection with Agilulf’s own policy, worrying instead about his troops and those of Arogis (*Reg.* 9.44). The conditions did not please Gregory, who pressured the king to impose stricter terms on the two rebels. The fact that Gregory now refers to Agilulf as ‘Ariulf’s king’ suggests that some sort of connection had been made between the two parties, possibly during Agilulf’s campaign south in 593–94. In any case, the pope suspected Ariulf was looking for an excuse to break the treaty, suggesting that his counselor, a woman named Warnilfrida, had already rejected the oath, and that Ariulf would do as she said (*Reg.* 9.44). The same letter reveals the strain in the relations between the pope and the king, who at that point had just sent envoys to Arogis to try to patch up the deal. There is no information on how the deal was closed, but by the end of 598 Gregory wrote to Agilulf to celebrate the truce, signed for one year (*Reg.* 9.66, 68 [Nov.–Dec. 598]).⁴⁷ The truce was renewed in the

summer of 600 (until March 601) (*Reg.* 10.16 [July 600]). Apart from a few clashes on the right to nominate the new bishop of Milan, Agilulf and Gregory seem to have been on good terms by 601 (*Reg.* 11.6 [Sept. 600]; *Reg.* 11.21 [Feb. 601]).

- 44 Esp. with Theudelinda: *Greg. Reg.* 5.52 (July 595), 9.68 (Nov.–Dec. 598), 14.12 (Dec. 603). On the peace negotiations, see Ricci 2013, 39–40, who, I believe, puts too much trust in Paul the Deacon.
- 45 The lack of opposition and the absence of mentions to an exarch in *Greg. Reg.* 6.33 suggest Romanus was no longer there by April 596, see *PLRE* 3.2, Romanus 7, 1092–93. The new exarch is first referred to in April 597 (*Greg. Reg.* 7.18), and first named in June 597 (*Reg.* 7.26).
- 46 This year also observed an overall reduction in aggression: Gregory wrote to his friend Rusticiana in Constantinople, saying it was safe to come and visit Rome (*Reg.* 8.22 [May 598]), while his letter to the *magister militum* Maurentius in Naples asks for chairs (*Reg.* 9.17 [Oct. 598]).
- 47 The treaty was about to expire in July 599 (*Greg. Reg.* 9.196 [July 599]).

By 602, Gregory had built a working relationship between the imperial forces in Ravenna and the anti-imperial forces spread throughout the peninsula. This new arrangement is best exemplified by a batch of letters sent south in beginning of 599. In need of beams to repair the church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome, Gregory mobilized the authorities in southern Italy to guarantee the necessary logistics for the operation. This involved making available locally workers and oxen for extraction and transportation. The pope directed a number of letters to local authorities (*Reg.* 9.125–28 [Feb.–Apr. 599]), including the military commander in Naples, Maurentius (125), but also two powerful men in Campania, the ex-prefect Gregory (126) and Arogis, now properly referred to as ‘duke’ (127). In a similar instance of routine cooperation, when Gregory invited the sickly bishop Marinianus of Ravenna to come to Rome, he suggested the bishop should ask Agilulf for an escort—a service Gregory had attempted to obtain from the imperial authorities in the past (*Reg.* 11.21 [Feb. 601]; cf. *Reg.* 9.117–118 ([Feb.–Apr. 599])). The Lombards had finally been integrated into a system that accounted for the imperial authorities in parts of Italy, and an overall moral sovereignty of the Church. That picture changed in November 602, when another military rebellion started, now on the Danube, which ended with the decapitation of the emperor in Constantinople.

Agilulf, *rex totius Italiae*

The murder of Maurice in the end of 602 marks the beginning of a time of turmoil in the empire that created an exceptionally

advantageous situation for Agilulf in Italy. The coup resulted from a military uprising in the Balkans that proclaimed emperor a certain Phocas, who then marched to Constantinople, eventually deposing and executing Maurice (Kaegi 1981, 101–19, but notice Meier 2014). The coup generated a series of unpredictable consequences in foreign policy, as the Persian king Khusro II, using the illegitimacy of Phocas's nomination as an excuse, launched a new war against the empire. Needing to reinforce the eastern front, Phocas was forced to move troops from the Balkans to the East, a process that continued with Heraclius. As a result, the defenses on the Danube were gradually abandoned, leaving room for a deeper penetration of the Avars and the Slavs into the region (Lilie 1985; Pohl 1988, 237–44; Whitby 1988, 184–91; Fine 1991, 25–73; Haldon 1997, 43). With the collapse of Maurice's Balkan project, the importance of Italy in the imperial strategy plummeted. The choice of the new exarch, Smaragdus, reflects this new reality (Goubert 1951a, vol. 2/2, 78–88, 111–21). Smaragdus had been the first exarch to negotiate terms with the Lombards in the 580s (p. 94) and his renomination was a clear sign of the new directions set for Italy: negotiate, compromise, and try to survive. With this understanding, and in the certainty that no help could come from Constantinople, Smaragdus was eager to negotiate with the Lombards (*HL* 4.28 [peace in 604]; *HL* 4.32).⁴⁸ The retreat of the imperial influence, however, went much further than this collapse of resources. The fall of Maurice and the usurpation of Phocas caused a serious crisis of legitimacy in the empire: Phocas was the first usurper to succeed in taking over Constantinople, and his rule went from crisis to crisis until he was deposed following another mutiny, in 610, this time incited by the exarch of Africa, Heraclius (senior) who then moved to raise his son (Heraclius, 610–41) to the purple (Stratos 1968, vol. 1, 80–92; Ostrogorsky 1980, 76–78; Haldon 1997, 35–48; Kaegi 2003; Meier 2014).⁴⁹

At same time, the second big player in Italy was also facing internal problems. In Francia, after the death of Gunthram (592), Burgundy had passed to Childebert II, whose death in 596 brought yet another long civil war between his sons Theudebert II (†612) and Theuderic II (†613) on one side, and Chilperic's only surviving son, Chlothar II (†629), on the other, and eventually, Theudebert II against his own brother Theuderic II. The war lasted until the death of both Childebert's sons and the unlikely victory of Chlothar in 613 (Ewig 1988, 50–52; Wood 1994b, 88–101; Collins 2010, 165–66). Until then, the Franks lacked the capacity and the political will to set the pace of politics in Italy, a condition of which Agilulf was certainly well aware. It is interesting to point out that, in the *CH*, Agilulf's reign started only after Maurice's fall: the *CH* (1544) claims that after

Phocas came to power, Agilulf defeated the Romans who were ‘fighting amongst themselves’ (*contra se dimicantes*), a position that may reflect the ‘chronicle source II’. Although chronologically incorrect, this take on Agilulf’s reign was not completely misled: after the collapse of the government in the east, Agilulf was given a brand new position in Italy, and a path to supremacy over the entire peninsula he was sure to grasp.

- 48 Cf. the first negotiations of peace under Callinicus (*HL* 4.12, also *Greg. Reg.* 6.33).
- 49 Olster (1993, 1–22) has suggested one should take the chaos of Phocas’s reign with a grain of salt, since much of our information might be influenced by negative propaganda from the government of Heraclius, contested by Sarris 2006, 231–32.

Agilulf used his newly found power to dismantle the containing system Romanus had put in place in 590–92. For that, he could now rely on the support of the Avars. The collapse of the Danubian frontier also gave the Avars more room to act in Italy and Agilulf was able to use them as mercenary forces. Moving into Italy was also in the best interest of the Khan, who could count on Agilulf to defuse the threat to his flank in Friuli. Agilulf had arguably already attempted a similar collaboration in 599, when the Slavs attacked Istria as a distraction to the siege of Padua (*HL*. 4.23, 24).⁵⁰ With the imperial troops retreating in the Balkans, Agilulf was able to use Avar (and Slav) troops in Italy, likely paying them with the wealth he had recently received from Rome and Ravenna. Agilulf relied on them for manpower often in the following years (*HL* 4.24, 4.28). With the support of the Avars, Agilulf turned to Friuli: with the Avars coming west from Pannonia, and the royal forces crossing the Adige through Verona (presumably through the still-standing Ponte Pietra), there was not much the duke in Cividale could do to prevent a total encirclement. There is no information on the fortune of the Friulian duke Gisulf after he joined ranks with the empire in 590, and it is likely that he remained connected to Ravenna. At the beginning of 603, with the imperial government in disarray, Gisulf had few options left but to turn to Milan. Together with the Trentine duke Gaidoald, who, Paul suggests, had also broken relations with Agilulf, Gisulf came to terms with the king (*HL* 4.27). It is likely that the siege of Treviso, and the capture of the Ulfari, who had ‘rebelled against the Lombards’, happened as part of this thrust east.

With most of the Po Valley under his control, all that was left for Agilulf to dismantle Romanus’s reordering of the eastern Po Valley was to secure the bridges over the Po. Thus, starting the campaign in July 603, Agilulf captured Cremona after a siege in August, then

Mantua (presumably capturing the bridge over the Po south of the city), and finally the fortress of Vulturina, which surrendered—the Byzantine soldiers fled and burnt Brescello to the ground, possibly trying to destroy the bridge. In most of this campaign, Agilulf relied on the Avars (in this case, Slavs under Avar command) as auxiliaries. Shortly after this campaign season was over, the Avars invaded Friuli and disposed of the troublesome duke Gisulf, with or without Agilulf's consent—the invasion produced a massive slaughter whose trauma was still remembered by the time Paul was writing.⁵¹ After seeing all the imperial gains from the campaigns of 590–92 crumble, Smaragdus sued for peace (*HL* 4.28, Greg. Reg. 14.12 [Dec. 603]—possibly the same peace referred to in *LP*, Vita Sabiani, 67.1).

50 The Slavs' incursion is probably the one Gregory praises Callinicus for defeating (Reg. 9.155 [May 599]); the attack on Padua probably happened before the peace was agreed upon in late 598.

51 The traditional date, 610, is arbitrary, and depends on Paul's placing of the story ('Circa hac tempora') after Heraclius's coup in that year. As argued above, this type of introduction signals material Paul did not know exactly where to place. Paul's narrative of the destruction of Friuli by the Avars is central to his 'Grimoald' narrative, and one should be careful to incorporate of his details to reconstruct early seventh-century events; for a detailed analysis of the role of the story in Paul's narrative, see Fabbro, forthcoming 2020. For the connection between Agilulf and the Avar invasion of Friuli, see; Jarnut 1982, 46; Delogu 1980, 39.

Agilulf then moved into Tuscia, a region especially poorly documented for the period. In 606, after confirming the peace with the Romans, Agilulf moved to the region and subdued the resistance in Bagnarea and Orvieto (*HL* 4.32). This southward move is the last recorded military activity of the king. Agilulf had been maneuvering in Tuscia since the early 590s and these two towns were probably not under the exarch's control, and thus the truce between Milan and Ravenna was not necessarily violated. The three-year peace celebrated in 607 was renewed in 610 for another year. This time Agilulf negotiated directly with Phocas (*HL* 4.35). The peace was renewed under Heraclius in 611 and again in 612 (*HL* 4.40).

The new Lombard monarchy

Phocas's rebellion in the East provided Agilulf with the opportunity to spread his domain in Italy, eastward towards Friuli and southward towards Tuscia, and to establish a new relationship with Ravenna. The crisis of legitimacy in Constantinople may also be responsible for Agilulf's construction of a new political ideology that reclothed the

Lombard kingdom's power in traditional Roman models. The sources are, again, extremely fragmentary, and no surviving document provides a clear statement of what he intended the Lombard kingship to stand for—different from that which Rothari's *Edict* did three decades later (see [Chapter 5](#)). What survived are a few instances of public performance of kingship (mostly preserved in the 'chronicle source II'), some fragmentary evidence of Agilulf's religious policy, and two artifacts (Agilulf's crown and the Val di Nievole Plate) bearing some sort of political statement.

This new public display of power can already be seen in 603, when Agilulf had his son Adaloald baptized by Secundus in the church of St. John in Monza (*HL* 4.27; cf. *Greg. Reg.* 14.12 [Dec. 603]). In a letter, the pope sent his best wishes to the new 'king', gifting him with 'a crucifix with wood from the holy cross of our Lord, and a text from a holy evangelist, enclosed in a peachtree case' (*Reg.* 14.12) The church in Monza had recently been renovated by Theudelinda, possibly in preparation for the baptism of either Adaloald or his older sister.⁵² The two votive crowns belonging to the treasure of that church (one ascribed to Theudelinda, the other to Agilulf) were presumably donated at this period. Agilulf's crown did not survive, but was preserved in a drawing made in 1717 (Elze 1955, 1974, 1980).⁵³ Reinhard Elze examined the drawing and, comparing the depictions of the still existing crown of Theudelinda, was convinced of its accuracy. Here is his description of 'Agilulf's crown', according to the drawing: In the same face, which is the main one, there are fifteen human figures within a series of arches, separated by columns with capitals and bases; the figures represent, from the left to the right, Christ, an archangel, the twelve apostles, and a second archangel. Above the fifteen figures, one can read the famous inscription: + agilulf grat[ia] d[e]i vir glor[iosus? iosissimus?] rex totius ital[ie] off eret s[an]c[t]o iohanni baptiste in eccl[esia] modicia. The 'proper measure' of the drawing, that is, that of the lost crown, corresponds to the following dimensions: 63.5 cm of length on the outside and 60.5 cm on the inside; width of 8.5 cm.

(Elze 1980, 396)

Most remarkable in this object is the title for the king, *rex totius Italiae*.⁵⁴ The title is not otherwise recorded for any Lombard king, and in itself is rather peculiar: Agilulf is not portraying himself as the king of a *gens* (*Rex Langobardorum* as later Lombard kings did),⁵⁵ but as king of 'all Italy', that is, on both sides of the Po. If the crown was actually produced for the baptism, and was part of the ceremony, it conveyed a strong ideological statement. The king had his heir baptized—raised from the baptismal pool by Secundus, a tricapitoline

cleric⁵⁶—and, at the occasion, he claimed to be the rightful ruler of the entire peninsula (cf. Delogu 2004, 111).

- 52 Greg. *Reg.* 14.12 refers to a sister, most likely Gundeperga. McCormick (1986, 288–89) suggests that the link with John the Baptist might be connected to similar practices in Constantinople.
- 53 The authenticity of the crown has been questioned in the past, and up to this day it is an open question; for a recent take on the crown and the question of authenticity, see La Rocca and Gasparri 2010; La Rocca 2015. The authors conclude, however, that there are elements pointing to a forgery, and elements pointing to its authenticity. Given the extremely unusual title, I am inclined to assume the crown has an element of truth: a later forger, especially one aware of the authentic references in the piece, would certainly avoid a title that might bring suspicions, and would have avoided a formula that had no parallel elsewhere.
- 54 The expression *totius Italiae* has equivalents in earlier imperial propaganda, both in an inscription placed by Narses in the *Pons Salaris* ('libertate urbis Romae et totius Italiae restituta' in CIL, VI, 1199, now lost) and in Justinian's *Pragmatica Sanctio* (universa Italia)—cf. *LP*, Vita Iohannis III, 63.2: 'Erat enim tota Italia gaudens' (emphasis added); see Mores 2011, 170–71. Columbanus possibly used a similar expression, *tota Italia*, in a letter to Boniface (*Ep. Col.* 5), though it is preserved in only one of the manuscripts (other mss. read *tota Ecclesia*); see pp. 135–36. Schneider (1972, 32) also remarked the use of 'gratia Dei'.
- 55 Although not consistently: as far as the surviving evidence shows, *Rex Langobardorum* seems reserved for the law codes, while in royal charters the kings tend to go by *vir excellentissimus rex*, cf. *CDL* 3.1.
- 56 Secundus's tricapitoline inclination is clear in Greg. *Reg.* 14.12 (Pohl 2004b, 2007). On Secundus's role in the baptism, Mores 2011, 258–71.

In July 604,⁵⁷ the king gathered the *populus* in the circus at Milan, and proclaimed Adaloald king, in the presence of Frankish envoys from Theudebert, the Austrasian king (*HL* 4.30). The elevation of Adaloald follows the practice in Constantinople, where the circus was the space of publication—i.e., of rendering public—of power (Schneider 1972, 33–35; McCormick 1986, 288; for the role of the circus, see Beck 1975; Cameron 1976). The presence of the Frankish ambassadors is also highly significant. The elevation was a clear demonstration of strength—in a very Roman language—to the Franks: in the circus, the Lombard king was portrayed to the Franks as the Roman ruler of all Italy. At the same time, the Frankish ambassadors were there to show that the powerful Frankish kingdom across the Alps supported the king, a message that carried extra strength by the betrothal of Adaloald to the daughter of Theudebert II. The Lombard policy of conciliation with the Franks was maintained, and in a few years Agilulf arranged the suspension of the annual tribute the Lombards paid to the Franks.⁵⁸ The elevation of Adaloald marked the ripening of Agilulf's Italian policy and represented his newly acquired

position in Italy.

A similar representation can be seen in the famous Val di Nievole plate.⁵⁹ The plate, found in the nineteenth century in Val di Nievole, is a small gold-coated bronze sheet (18.9 cm x 6.7 cm), decorated with a central figure surrounded by eight people, four on each side. It has been suggested that it was part of a helmet, although fragments of wood on the back imply that it was probably nailed to a wooden surface, such as a wooden casket or a throne.⁶⁰ The scene is centered on a figure sitting on a traditional *sella curulis*, a consular chair, in the usual *adlocutio* position (i.e., holding up his right hand showing two fingers) (McCormick 1986, 289–90). In his lap he holds what has been interpreted as a sword, although it is more likely a scepter, as is often seen in consular diptychs.⁶¹ Two soldiers, wearing helmets and mail, armed with spear and shields, flank him. The second row has two winged victories, carrying what seems to be two *cornucopiae* (but which may be drinking horns) in one hand, and a banner on the other: the one on the left says ‘victuria’ while the one on the right says ‘d[om]n[o] ag il[ul]f u regi’. The following row has two figures in supplicant position, with their hands extended with the palms up. The final row has two figures bringing objects that resemble the traditional *orbes* in imperial coinage, traditionally used as a symbol of power either in the hand of the emperor or in the hands of *Victoria*.⁶² Finally, two poles that, most likely, represent fasces (or maybe towns), frame the scene.

⁵⁷ According to *HL* 4.30; in Greg. *Reg.* 14.12 (Dec. 603) the pope already calls Adaloald ‘rex’, which might suggest he was made king in the year before.

⁵⁸ Fredegar (4.45) places that negotiation in 617 (‘Anno xxxiiii regni Chlothariae’), though that would set the negotiations after the death of Agilulf in 616. It is not impossible that the negotiations to suspend the tribute were connected to the marriage, and that the marriage was arranged in 604, only to take place once Adaloald came to power. Then again, Fredegar’s date might just be wrong.

⁵⁹ A high-definition image is available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agilulf> (accessed October 5th, 2019).

⁶⁰ The plate has received its share of skepticism (La Rocca and Gasparri 2010, 279–86). I retain the plate for the same reasons I retained the crown: a forger would probably aim for something more identifiable and less unique. As with the crown, nonetheless, the legitimacy is an open question. For the traditional idea that the plate was part of a military helmet, see Hessen 1981, more recently, Lusuardi Siena 1999. For the hypothesis that it was fixed in some sort of wooden board, see Frugoni 1998; Kurze 1980.

⁶¹ See, for example, the Consular diptych (c.480) in Prague (Bibliothek des Metropolitancapitels, Inv. Cim. 2; Delbrück N40), and the Consular diptych (c.490) in Paris (Collection Béarn, C54, Delbrück N41) in Delbrück 1929, 169–74. Similarly, the ‘Lampadiorum diptych’ in Brescia (Civici Musei d’Arte e Storia) and the Ivory diptych leaf in Halberstadt (Domschatz) in Kiielerich 1993,

Fig. 81 and Fig. 107, resp. *Contra* McCormick, who describes it as ‘in a most unimperial detail, he clasps his sword in his lap’. In addition to that, McCormick believes his ‘long hair, moustache and long, pointed beard proclaim his non-Romanness’ (McCormick 1986, 290). On beards and long hair as non-Roman, see Amory 1997, 338–47.

- 62 See, for example, Maurice’s coins (numbers 3, 4, 14 in the Hunter Coin Cabinet), and Heraclius’s (9–13 in the Hunter Coin Cabinet) in Bateson and Campbell 1998.

As Gasparri and La Rocca have pointed out, the interpretation of the scene is very complicated, and is bound to be extremely speculative.⁶³ It has been suggested that the image combines ‘Germanic’ and Roman elements, producing an extraordinary iconographic representation of the ‘post-Roman Germanic kingdoms’.⁶⁴ It is hard to see what would be specifically ‘Germanic’ in the picture. The image depicts all kinds of Roman symbols of power and plenty: the Victories bringing *cornucopiae* (to resolve the image in one direction), the consular chair, and the fasces; even the clothes on Agilulf point to a traditional Roman consul, and not a warrior king. The *orbis* are harder to contextualize, but they resemble, as mentioned, the *orbis* carried by the emperors in Byzantine coins. But on the coins, the emperor holds the *orbis* himself or, when two emperors are represented, each holds one (see n. 62 for examples). Was the intention to portray Agilulf’s victories over two emperors (Maurice and Phocas)? Or, alternatively, could the two *orbis* represent the submission of both Rome and Ravenna—the two imperial capitals that recently acknowledged Agilulf by paying tribute to the king? It is hard to tell. Nonetheless, the language of power used by the image is clearly Roman, in its form and in its syntax.

- 63 It has been seen as the representation of a triumph (McCormick 1986, 291–93), a coronation (Hessen 1981, 14–15) or even as a *gairethinx* (Dilcher 2006, 454ff.).

- 64 E.g., Tom Brown’s commentaries in Delogu’s paper in Delogu 2009, 276, see also Delogu 1980, 43.

It has been suggested that, by conforming to Roman symbols, Agilulf intended to emulate imperial procedure, in order to authenticate his power towards his ‘Roman subjects’ (e.g., Bognetti 1966–68, 272–302; Schneider 1972, 33–35; Delogu 2009, 252–55; Gasparri 2017, 110–11). This mimicry, carefully designed by Agilulf’s *ministri romani*, would represent the king’s interest in preserving the Roman population by adopting Roman culture. Bognetti called this period the ‘summer of the dead’ (*estate dei morti*), characterizing Agilulf’s reign as a brief postmortem continuation of the decaying Roman culture (see esp. Bognetti 1966–68, 380; 1966a, and more

recently; Delogu 2004, 106–07; 2009, 252–53). Agilulf, however, was arguably using the language that was familiar to him: he was not so much *copying* the symbols of power from Constantinople, as he was *performing* them in a different context.⁶⁵ The lack of legitimacy in the East had allowed him to appropriate such language and to reproduce it on a microscale in Italy. His innovation was to appropriate imperial symbols within a restricted Italian context. In a sense, Agilulf is emulating Theodoric, who also sought to redesign traditional Roman themes in a post-Roman world (Delogu 2009, 254–55).⁶⁶

These representations of power provide a frame for the historiographical production under Agilulf. As argued above, the ‘chronicle source II’ was produced under royal direction and might have been presented to the king at some point after 612. Based on the fragments that survived in other texts, this work seems to have praised Agilulf’s conquest of ‘Italy’, that is, his victory over the exarch in 603, leading to the peace and tribute in 606, and renewed repeatedly after that. Agilulf was to be portrayed not as a simple military commander but as a ruler. That is probably the context of the title ‘Flavius’, which Paul claims Authari was the first to use (*HL* 3.16). The title was a reference not simply to the Roman tradition but especially to Theodoric and the former unified government of Italy.⁶⁷ Although Authari might have been the first one to use ‘Flavius’, it is not too far-fetched to suppose that the title was adopted only later, as part of Agilulf’s post-602 policy, and ascribed retrospectively to Authari by the ‘chronicle source II’, where Paul may have found it.⁶⁸ This focus on unity and consolidation is probably behind the emphasis in the renewal of treaties, which can be found in the *HL*. Similarly, the stress on Agilulf’s mercy towards defeated soldiers (*HL* 4.23, 28) also reinforces the impression that one of the goals of this work was to celebrate the king as paving the way for a new phase in Italian history. Another aspect of this renewed interest was the pictorial representation of Lombard history displayed at the church in Monza, which Paul could still see in his days (*HL* 4.22).⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Cf. McCormick (1986, 295–96), who suggests that the primary objectives of the Roman-inspired ceremonies was ‘to enhance the monarchy’s prestige and that imitation of the Roman emperor was a viable means of doing it’.

⁶⁶ The evidence, however, does not support Delogu’s idea that Agilulf attempted to ‘create a Roman-barbarian kingdom’ in the modes of the late fifth-century Frankish and Visigothic kingdoms (a ‘two-people kingdom’); *contra* Delogu 2009, 255.

⁶⁷ Andrew Gillett (2002b, 116) has recently questioned the weight of *Flavius* as a marker of the imperial office, cf. Niccolai 1946; Wolfram 1967, 56–75, esp. 64–67; Christou 1991, 137–38; Hammer 2014, 250. Amongst the Lombards, the title most likely suggested a continuation with the previous Ostrogothic kingdom and titulature.

- 68 Besides Paul, there is no evidence of Authari's use of the title, but the evidence on Authari is, overall, scanty. The earliest mention of the title is for Agilulf, named 'Flavius' in the charter of a donation to Bobbio (CDL 3.1), although the surviving document is a later copy. More traditionally, see Delogu 2009, 254–55.
- 69 On Theudelinda's church, see now Hammer 2014. I support Hammer's suggestion that the mural in Monza was connected to contemporary historical production, but I find the idea that this context is related to the *Origo* unconvincing, since it depends on his (admittedly speculative) early dating of that text. For the context of composition of the *Origo*, see pp. 152–53.

This emphasis on unity was not mere rhetoric. The evidence, albeit limited, for Agilulf's religious policy reveals the king's efforts to mend divisions (Bognetti 1966–68, 272–84; Brown 2009; Fanning 1981). What makes Agilulf's religious policy conspicuous is not its originality, but its firm grounding in the Roman past. This push to bring ecclesiastical authorities into his fold is probably also the context for the oath Agilulf received from bishops in northern Italy (*Ep. Lang.* 2). Already in 600, Agilulf meddled with the election of the bishop of Milan in order to restore the see (then in Genoa) to the city of Milan, causing a strong reaction from pope Gregory, who denounced the election as uncanonical (Greg. Reg. 11.6; see Mores 2011, 237–39). Agilulf was also called to mediate the succession of the patriarchate of Aquileia, then in Grado. Whether Paul's suggestion that John was appointed for the seat in old Aquileia is true or not, it points to the king's attempt to mediate religious controversies to restore harmony (*Ep. Lang.* 1; *HL* 4.33). In both elections, Agilulf was acting in the now traditional role of a late Antique ruler, attempting to facilitate the reconciliation of the Church.

In 612, Agilulf received Columbanus and offered him land to found a monastery, Bobbio.⁷⁰ The donation is the first surviving royal diploma: it is dated to 612, and is preserved in a copy in Bobbio. In this charter, the king presents himself as *vir excellentissimus rex*, addresses Columbanus piously, and dates the document using the traditional Roman indiction (CDL 3.1, cf. Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, 1.30; Brühl 1970, 19–48). The monastery was placed in a strategic location, on the border with Tuscia, on the path to the recent conquests of the king in the region. Columbanus, firmly on the king's side, wrote to the pope on his behalf, informing him that Agilulf wanted the pope to solve once and for all the question of the Three Chapters (Gray and Herren 1994, 170):

- 70 On Columbanus, see Bullough 1997; Wood 2001, 31–39, and more recently Bracken 2002. For the relationship with the Lombards, the classical work is Mor 1933a, but see the objections in Mores 2011, 273–93. On the foundation of Bobbio, see Bischoff 1964, esp. 490–91, and more recently Cammarosano 1998,

Moreover after this opportunity to write, there comes an order of king Agilulf, whose content put me in shock and endless concern, of course, for I think what I see could not be without a miracle. For the kings, who had established this Arian plague in this region, trampling the Catholic faith, now plead our faith to be strengthened (...) So pleads the king, and so pleads the queen, all plead to you to, as fast as you can, let the whole become one, let there be peace in the fatherland, peace of the faith, so that all can henceforth become one flock of Christ. King of kings, you, Peter, let the whole of Italy follow you.

(*Ep. Col.* 5)

The letter discloses Agilulf's policy for unification, and his rhetoric of peace over war.⁷¹ To Columbanus—and certainly to Agilulf—the unification passed over the end of the schism, abandoning the 'old heresies' that separated Rome from the north.

Agilulf's reign marks the end of a half-century process of settlement and accommodation of the Lombards in Italy. The favorable external conditions—the Frankish and Byzantine civil wars—allowed him to turn the rebelling military commanders and his subject into a people, and to claim authority over *tota Italia*. To do so, he had to put down the resistance of the Lombard dukes, more often than not interested in continuing the ambivalent position vis-à-vis Constantinople. Succeeding in what Ravenna had failed to do, he reincorporated them into the army, putting an end to the centrifugal tendencies of the last decades. He also defeated the Byzantine forces in the peninsula, but at the same time he managed to harvest the reluctant support of Gregory the Great, who saw the king as the sole guarantee for the church properties in central Italy. Once he gathered enough momentum, Agilulf strove to fit the traditional forms of power. Agilulf's legitimacy rested on turning the Lombard army into part of Italian society, in the same role the army had played in the past. Agilulf's successes testify not only to his capacity as a ruler and as a commander, but also to the effectiveness of the Lombard army, which was equally victorious in suppressing rebel dukes and Byzantine regular troops. At his death in 616, Agilulf left Adaloald the direct control of a significant part of the peninsula and claim to sovereignty over the tributaries Rome and Ravenna, as well as the title of king of Italy; above all, he left him a political project of an Italian kingdom encompassing the entire peninsula.

⁷¹ And *not* a theocratic project of a national Church, as envisioned in Bognetti 1966–68, 214–15; see Everett 2003, 83; Mores 2011, 267.

The Frankish ‘matriarchate’ (c. 616–636)

But Agilulf’s project was not to be. After him, the Lombards drifted back under Frankish influence. The following two decades can be described as a period of the ‘Frankish matriarchate’, the rule of the influential Theudelinda, wife of two kings, and then that of her daughter, Gundeperga, who was queen to another two kings, Arioald and Rothari, after the death of her brother Adaloald. It is impossible to trace the reach of the political influence of Lombard queens, although the careers of the Frankish Fredegund and Brunhild, Goiswinth in Spain, and Emma in England might provide some kind of model. Nonetheless, both queens personified the Frankish influence in the Lombard court and their power stemmed from the support they received from beyond the Alps. This subsection analyzes the afterlife of Agilulf’s political project in the decades that separate his death from the accession of Rothari.

The reigns of Adaloald and Arioald are especially poorly documented. The ‘chronicle source II’ stopped before the death of Agilulf, and no other historical narrative survived until the *CH* was compiled in the early days of Rothari’s reign (see pp. 151–52). Fredegar had access to a few anecdotes involving Adaloald and Arioald, which reveal some of the dynamics of the period. Paul was dismissive of this material; even if he incorporated most of the stories, he rearranged them in different contexts (cf. *HL* 4.28 and Fred. 4.69; *HL* 1.8 and Fred. 3.65; *HL* 4.51 and Fred. 4.9). Although limited, the evidence for Adaloald’s reign points to the demise of Agilulf’s political project and the reinstatement of the Frankish supremacy in northern Italy.⁷² The advantageous conditions Agilulf experienced from 602 on came to an end in the second decade of the seventh century. By 613, Chlothar II (d. 629) was the sole Merovingian ruler, beginning a period of almost three decades of political stability in Francia, first under Chlothar II, and later under his son Dagobert (629–39) (Ewig 1976b, 173–92; Geary 1988, 151–78; Wood 1994b, 140–58). In the East, Heraclius (610–43) replaced Phocas and, although his rule was far from stable, he provided a boost to imperial legitimacy (Haldon 1997, 41–42; Kaegi 2003, 58–99; Meier 2014). A significant part of the period was consumed by a civil war between Adaloald and Arioald, which ended with Arioald’s victory. No attempt to legitimize Arioald’s grasp for power survived, nor did any work trying to make sense of the events. Most of the information comes from one letter (*Ep. Lang.* 2), sent by pope Honorius (625–38) to Isaac, the exarch in Ravenna (c.615–43), which reveals some context for this civil war. The details remain, nonetheless, evasive. Adaloald and Arioald were closely related: Arioald was married to Adaloald’s sister Gundeperga

before his rebellion and (as Agilulf before him) was duke of Frankish Turin (Fred. 4.50–51; cf. Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, 2.24). In the background lingers the authoritative figure of Theudelinda, the queen mother (589–c.625), and that of her daughter Gundeperga, who, Fredegar suggests, maintained the full support of the Frankish monarchy (Fred. 4.51, 4.71).

- 72 On Adaloald, see Bognetti 1966–68, 291–302; Schneider 1972, 35–37; Frohlich 1980, 115–25; Delogu 1980, 51–52; Wickham 1981, 34–36; Jarnut 1982, 54–57, and more recently, Jarnut 2003, 420; Christou 1991, 190–92; Borri 2014, 45; Gasparri 2017, 111–13.

Eleutherius and Adaloald

To what extent did Adaloald continue his father's policy of unifying Italy? Some evidence for Adaloald's policy comes from the activities of the Byzantine patrician Eleutherius, sent to Italy around 616 to suppress a new round of insurgency both in Naples and Ravenna.⁷³ According to the *LP*, Eleutherius successfully dealt with the rebels, and, once back in Ravenna, 'he paid the arrears to the army and brought peace back to Italy' (*LP*, *Vita Deusdedit*, 70.2; on Eleutherius, see Stewart 2017, 33–34). The *CH* complements the *LP*, mentioning Eleutherius's dealings with Adaloald: Eleutherius was involved in several skirmishes with the Lombard army, but was soundly beaten by a certain Sundrarius, who had been 'assigned in Agilulf's [government] to military affairs' (*qui apud Agilulfum bellicis rebus instructus erat*) (*CH* 1554).⁷⁴ Adaloald's victories over Eleutherius attest to the continuing efficiency of the Lombard army, at least into the second decade of that century. Eventually, convinced that he could not defeat the Lombards, Eleutherius came to terms with Adaloald, promising to [resume?] pay the five *centenaria* of gold promised to Agilulf during the siege of Rome—a payment, which, as suggested above, might have implied recognition of the Lombards' position in Italy (*CH* 1554). In an entry similar to the *LP*, the continuator mentions that Eleutherius, once he was certain of his alliance with the Lombards (*CH* 1555), rebelled against the government in Constantinople (now in disarray on account of the Persian invasions) (Kaegi 1973; Haldon 1997, 42–43), and claimed the purple. His troops, however, turned on him, and his head was sent to Constantinople (*CH* 1555; *LP*, *Vita Bonifatii*, 71.2). What kind of agreement Eleutherius established with Adaloald is unclear: was it related to Eleutherius's rebellion in some way? In the current state of the documentation, the only certainty is that Eleutherius enjoyed, if not the support, at least the acquiescence of the Lombards. It is

tempting to see Adaloald's connection with Eleutherius as a continuation of Agilulf's plan, now bringing together the still-Byzantine Ravenna into a united kingdom. Whether it was done on Adaloald's initiative or by Eleutherius's, Italy might have been united under the two leaders, had the coup succeeded. The troops in Ravenna, however, stood against Eleutherius and murdered him while he was in transit, opting to support the imperial power in the East.

- 73 Dating is extremely problematic. The *CH* has Eleutherius fighting with Adaloald (and no longer Agilulf), while the *Liber Pontificalis* places him during the pontificate of Deusdedit (615–18), which is probably the only timeframe we can establish with some security. It is likely that after Heraclius's political honeymoon was over, and especially after the debacle against the Persians in the East (616–20), the Italians resumed their political skepticism: around 616, the top command of Ravenna had been slaughtered, most likely by disgruntled soldiers, while a certain Iohannes of Compsa rebelled and assumed power in Naples, see *LP, Vita Deusdedit*, 70.1–2. On Eleutharius and the rebellions at this time, see Boggetti 1966–68, 165–67; Guillou 1969, 204–06, 224–25; Brown 1984, 151–61.
- 74 It is tempting to see Sundrarius holding the position that was formerly held by Paulus, mentioned by Gregory of Tours (*Hist* 10.3), and would eventually be occupied by Paulus's son, Petrus (*Ep. Lang.* 2); see n. 11.

The Frankish reaction

Whatever the real arrangement between Eleutherius and the Lombards was, it is possible that Adaloald's policy was not well regarded in Francia, and that the Franks supported Arioald, a usurper who at some point around 625 deposed Adaloald.⁷⁵ For the Franks, a unified kingdom in Italy was presumably bad news, whether in the hands of a Lombard ruler or back in imperial hands. The sources for Arioald's coup are meager (and the dating is specially problematic), but they seem to point to Frankish interference. Arioald was the duke of Turin, the same Frankish town that had supplied Agilulf, and was married to Gundeperga, the daughter of Theudelinda. Gundeperga seems to have inherited Theudelinda's role as a link between the two courts (Fred. 4.51, 4.71; see Wood 1994b, 167; Frohlich 1980, 121–24). At some point, probably around 625–26, Arioald rebelled against Adaloald, with the support of a group of bishops in northern Italy. The imperial forces soon got involved. The only surviving details come from a letter sent by pope Honorius I to the new exarch Isaac (c.625–643):

We have learnt by the messages of certain people, that certain *transpadani* bishops have expressed some words to Peter, the son of Paul, which were against the episcopal path, and, endowed with impious persuasion, hinted that he, Peter, should obey the tyrant

Arioald rather than king Adaloald, opening themselves to the crime of perjury. And, because the [*vir*] *gloriosus* Peter refused to be persuaded by their depraved advice (if it is permitted to say such a thing [of bishops]), but instead chose to preserve firmly the oath which he had given to king Agilulf, Adaloald's father, by your work, with the will of the heavenly virtue, Adaloald was restated to his kingdom. Care to send those bishops towards Rome, with the help of God, because we will allow for no reason this crime to go unpunished, because it is against God and the pious hearts, since the men, who should have forbid others from committing such offence, have enticed it to be committed.

(*Ep. Lang.* 2)

75 On Arioald, see Bognetti 1966–68, 303–11; Schneider 1972, 37–39; Frohlich 1980 125–27; Delogu 1980, 53–54; 2004, 117–21; Christou 1991, 192–95; Jarnut 1982, 56–58; Gasparri 2004, 16–18; Borri 2014.

The letter informs about the two camps: the pope sided with Adaloald, and, at least at some point, Isaac had intervened for the king and reinstated him to his kingdom; the *transpadani* bishops had sided with Arioald, and were trying to convince a certain Peter, who presumably held a high position in government (see n. 11), to abandon Adaloald. Peter, however, stood fast behind the king.

In addition to the letter, an anecdote was preserved in Fredegar, which recounts how Eusebius, an ambassador from the emperor Maurice, bewitched Adaloald using some sort of potion. Once under his influence, the king went mad, threatening to kill all the Lombard nobles (*primatis et nobiliores*) and surrender himself and the Lombards to the empire. Twelve of the nobles (a recurring number for Fredegar's Lombards, e.g., Fred. 4.45) turned against the mad king, killing him. Afterwards they elected as king Arioald, the duke of Turin married to Adaloald's sister Gundeperga (Fred. 4.49).⁷⁶ After that, Fredegar adds yet another story: a certain Adalulf, he recounts, tried to seduce Gundeperga, but was rebuked by the chaste queen: fearing for his life, he accused the queen of plotting against the king's life, colluding with the rebel duke of Tuscany, Taso. The king, believing in those words, incarcerated the queen in a tower in a certain *Caumello castro*. The Frankish king Chlothar II, worried about Gundeperga, a 'relative of the Franks' (*parentam Francorum*), sent a delegation to Italy in order to restore the queen to her position. At the suggestion of one of the envoys, Gundeperga was reinstated after her innocence was proved by judicial combat (Fred. 4.51).

Fredegar's first story smacks of Frankish propaganda: Adaloald was 'bewitched' by Eusebius, and was about to kill all the noble Lombards

and surrender the kingdom to the empire, but the valiant Lombards resisted and elected Arioald, who happened to be the duke of the Frankish controlled Turin, as a new king (Schneider 1972, 37). Whatever source Fredegar had for the civil war in Italy openly supported the Frankish intervention against the pro-empire Adaloald. The second story further supports the renewed Frankish influence. Once in power, Gundeperga's loyalty was questioned, but her virtue, defended by the Franks, was proved by battle. The story does not have to be believed to the letter: it suggests, however, the reach of Frankish foreign policy into Lombard affairs. Combined, the stories first speak of the reestablishment of order first against imperial machinations, then of Frankish intervention to preserve the new order.

76 Paul the Deacon (*HL* 4.41), probably using Fredegar as a source, slightly adjusted the story, effacing the imperial influence and claiming that Adaloald had simply gone insane, and was hence replaced by Arioald. Jarnut (1982, 56), commenting on the passage, has even suggested that the Lombards, too primitive to understand Adaloald's policy of conciliation, thought he was entranced or insane.

Considering the evidence, the coup could be explained thus: Adaloald maintained his father's plan to unify Italy not as *rex Langobardorum* but as *rex totius Italiae*, and as such, the next logical step was to bring into his orbit what remained of the Byzantine government in Ravenna. After defeating Eleutherius, he brought Ravenna back to the position Agilulf had left, tributary to the Lombards (*CH* 1554); more than that, he came up with an agreement with the exarch Eleutheris, which was solid enough to give the exarch confidence to sue for the purple. Eleutherius marched to Rome to be recognized, but was killed on the way. Had Eleutherius succeeded, Adaloald would presumably have been on his side, since the exarch counted on his support, maybe even sharing the command of an unified peninsula (which fitted Agilulf's view for Italy, and also accounts for the rumor in Fredegar that Adaloald intended to surrender to the empire). At this point, it is impossible to know if a successful Eleutherius would have received the support of the Church, but, once he had been defeated, the *LP* was certainly not generous towards him (*LP, Vita Bonifacii* 71.2); that volte-face notwithstanding, the pope maintained his support for Adaloald (*Ep. Lang.* 2). Whatever his involvement was, Adaloald aroused the suspicions of the Franks, who maneuvered to replace him with Arioald, a duke in nearby Turin and husband of Gundeperga. Arioald found support in *transpadani* bishops (*Ep. Lang.* 2), whose tricapitoline creed might be threatened by the political unification of Italy, and probably also among dukes who resented the increased royal power. In this sense, the centrifuge

forces in Italy favored a Frankish intervention: that is possibly the origin of Fredegar's statement that Adaloald decided to kill all the nobles (Fred. 4. 49). In Francia, the official view was that the intervention was justified by the bewitching of Adaloald and the mistreatment of Gundeperga. It is tempting to suggest that the event that finally prompted the Franks into action was the death of Theudelinda, at some point after 624, and the coming of age of the king.⁷⁷ Without his mother, the only connection Adaloald could claim to the Merovingian court was his wife, the daughter of Theudebert II, whose father had died on the wrong side in the civil war. Without a direct connection to the Franks, nothing could back his increasingly suspicious policy of conciliation with the empire. He was then probably sacked by his own dukes.

⁷⁷ The documentation on the queen after the death of Agilulf is limited: for a review of the sources, see Balzaretti 1999, 184–94. *CH* 1556 states that Adaloald received the care of the kingdom with Theudelinda, and ruled with her for ten years. The last mention of the queen is in a royal diploma: the dating in the charter is problematic, but we can establish it was dated from 623 to 625, although most likely 624, July 25th (8 kal. Augustas). (Brühl, the editor of *CDL* 3 made a convincing case for 624, though the other dates are also possible; for the issues with this dating, see *CDL* 3, p. 9.) After that, Theudelinda disappears from the historical record. The conventional date for her death, January 22nd 627/28, is widely accepted, see, for example, Balzaretti 1999, 207, n. 129; Hartmann 2009, 206, 215. However, that date comes from a secondhand report of a tombstone, mentioned by Frisi, that should have come from a no-longer extant work by a certain Tristano Calco: 'Dedicatio hujus Ecclesiae S. MICHAELIS celebrata fuit decimo quinto Kal. Februarii in CCCCCXXVIII, et hoc ipso anno mortua est THEUDELLINDA Regina' (in Troya, *CDL* 2, 1–3). The supposed tombstone is conflated with an entry to the also much later *Necrologio Monzese* (twelfth century), that claims that 'Obiit Dna Dna [sic] Regina THEODOLENDIA Anno Dni CCCCCC(XXVIII) die XXIJ. Ian. et sepulta nunc in capella sci UINCENTIJ'. Given the posthumous fame of the queen and her close ties with the history of the Church in Monza, this later evidence is very likely forged. To the extent of our knowledge, the queen could have been dead at any point after July 25th, 624. An earlier death is also suggested by another royal donation to Bobbio, from 625 or 626 (*CDL* 3.3), in which Adaloald confirmed the previous donations to Bobbio (*CDL* 3.1 & 3.2) and added another donation by a certain Zussone, but the queen is no longer mentioned.

Scholarship has often insisted on the contrast between the Romanized Adaloald and the traditionalist Arioald, mostly based on Arioald's Arianism and Adaloald's Catholicism (Bognetti 1966–68, 299ff.; Delogu 1980, 52; Wickham 1981, 35–36; Jarnut 1982, 56–57).⁷⁸ It is, however, hard to support the opposition between the two governments—Adaloald's and Arioald's—on the surviving evidence (Christou 1991, 191–93; Gasparri 2017, 113). The argument is based solely on the help offered by the church in Rome to Adaloald, as

testified by Honorius's letter to Isaac. Nonetheless, Honorius was arguably more concerned about the gains the Church obtained under Agilulf, and there is no evidence that he refused to come to terms with Arioald. The brief appearance of Arioald in Jonas's *Vita Columbani* (2.23–24) suggests the new king kept good relations with Catholics and was wise enough not to get too involved in theological affairs.

It is possible that Arioald eventually also came to terms with Isaac: according to Fredegar, the king bribed the exarch Isaac to murder Taso, the duke of Tuscany, and in return, Arioald offered a discount on the tribute the Lombards received annually from Ravenna, lowering it from three to two *centenaria* (Fred. 4.69. cf. *HL* 4.38). It is hard to know what to make of the story, apart from the fact that it provides further evidence that annual collection of tribute arranged by Agilulf and Gregory I and renewed by the time of Eleutharius continued at least until the 630s (though the values do not match: 3–2 *centenaria contra* 5 *centenaria*) (see p. 122). In sum, the little that survives about Arioald's policy is hardly antagonistic to Adaloald's, although the former might have been focused on a more local *transpadani* (and also *transalpine*) power base, while the latter had insisted on his father project of an unified Italy.

78 Adaloald's Catholicism is suggested by a letter from the Visigothic king Sisebutus (*Ep. Vis.* 9), while Arioald's Arianism is suggested in the *Vita Columbani* 2.24; the importance of religious affiliation in the Lombard kingdom has, however, recently been put in question (Fanning 1981; Brown 2009).

The Frankish 'matriarchy' was still influencing events when Arioald died in 635 and was replaced by Rothari. The new king, according to Fredegar a former duke of Brescia, came to power by association with Arioald's widow, Gundeperga. The role of the queen in the transmission, at least as Fredegar describes it, mirrors the role of Theudelinda with Agilulf:

Queen Gundeperga, because all the Lombards had sworn loyalty to her with oaths, ordered a certain Rothari, one of the dukes from Brescia, to come to her, forcing him to abandoned the wife he had and to receive her in matrimony, and on her account all the Lombards raised him to the throne (...) [W]ith Gundeperga's support, all the Lombard nobles raised Rothari to the throne.

(Fred. 4.70)

With the support of the queen, continues Fredegar, Rothari was able to put down resistance and pacify the kingdom. Fredegar, however, suggests that Rothari did not keep his vows, and imprisoned the queen in the court, forcing her to live a private life. She remained secluded

for five years, until news of her situation came to Francia. Clovis II (639–55), who by now had succeeded his father Dagobert, sent an embassy to Rothari, saying that:

‘he should not humiliate a relative of the Franks, whom he had as a queen, through whom also he had received the kingdom: the Frankish kings and the Franks were exceedingly displeased by that.’ So much reverence Rothari held for the Franks, that he ordered the queen to be released

(Fred. 4.71)

The imprisonment of Gundeperga, once again, served Fredegar as a reason for the Frankish intervention in the neighboring kingdom. The passage should be taken with a grain of salt, and its similarities with what the same author reports about Arioald makes it especially suspicious (Fred. 4.51). As in the previous passage, the anecdote speaks of a Frankish intervention in the early stages of the monarchy. It is part of the process of acknowledging Frankish influence. Nonetheless, it is tempting to see in the story Rothari testing the waters with the new Frankish king, Dagobert, at that stage still an infant.

The Frankish intervention highlights the continuation of the status quo established with Authari, which submitted Lombard policy to Frankish interests. As suggested above, Agilulf was an exception, and his independent position was only possible while the Franks were caught up in internecine conflicts. After Chlothar II triumphed as sole ruler, the Frankish court arguably resumed its influence on Italy, first through Theudelinda, and then through her daughter, Gundeperga. If the end of Adaloald was indeed conditioned by the death of Theudelinda, it could be suggested that power passed from *her* to her daughter (and not from Adaloald to Arioald): that should not come as a surprise, since before Adaloald, power had passed from Authari to Agilulf through the same queen. The same pattern was maintained in c.636 when Arioald died: Gundeperga is said to have chosen Rothari (c.636–52) as his successor, and Fredegar relates how the Franks were the ones backing her position (Fred. 4.70–71). In the period from Adaloald to the first years of Rothari, the Frankish court resumed its influence in Italy, presumably maintaining the same agenda of preserving a solid but limited monarchy in northern Italy, strong enough to serve as a buffer state against Byzantium (and to supply troops when necessary),⁷⁹ but not too strong to become in itself a threat. The tides, however, were again about to change.

⁷⁹ As Arioald did against the Wends and the Saxons (Fred. 4.68, cf. *Gesta Dagoberti*, 1.27).

5 New deal

In the 640s, the Lombard kingdom entered a new period of consolidation and expansion, mostly attributed to the skills of their new king. Rothari guaranteed fame in Lombard history on account of his *Edict*, which, published in 643, became the base of later Lombard legislation.¹ The *Edict* introduced Rothari into the ranks of the well-remembered Lombard kings. For instance, the author of the ninth-century *Origo Langobardorum codicis Gothanis* states ‘in the times of this king Rothari, a light arose in the darkness, through him the Lombards picked up the canonical battle and were made helpers of the clerics’ (*Cod. Goth.* c. 7). Similarly, Paul the Deacon narrated the story of a certain man, who dared to violate Rothari’s tomb, but found it guarded by St. John the Baptist, who, Paul reported, declared that ‘although [Rothari] may not have been of the true faith yet he has commended himself to me’ (*HL* 4.47). Rothari was also remembered by his conquest of the coastal Liguria, and his victories over the imperial forces. His later popularity notwithstanding, the sources for his reign are scanty, and the most prominent document, Rothari’s *Edict*, informs little about its historical context.

To understand the transformations in Lombard policy in the 640s, Rothari’s campaigns and, to some extent, the publication of the *Edict* (643), it is necessary to first highlight the profound changes in the external context at that time, namely, the temporary eclipse of power both in Francia and in Byzantium. As happened in Agilulf’s reign, Rothari witnessed a power vacuum, once the two main forces committed to Italy turned either to internal politics (Francia) or more pressing external threats (Byzantium). Such a situation gave the Lombards more room to operate and to renew their position in Italy.

The crisis in the East was prompted by the conflict between the empire and the Arabs: Heraclius, a few years after the tremendous victory over Persians and Avars in 627, which had stabilized his government, was again cast into a whirlwind of military disasters.² In 636, the Byzantine army was utterly defeated by the Arabs at Yarmuk, and evacuated from Syria into Anatolia. By 642, the Arabs had control of Egypt, Palestine, and Armenia—at the same time, Constantinople was forced to pull the troops out of Alexandria (Lilie 1976, esp. 40–

56; Haldon 1997, 49–50; Kaegi 2003, 229–64). In 649, the Arabs experimented with sea power and soon inflicted a disastrous victory at sea against Constans II (655) (Eickhoff 1966; Fahmy 1966). The Arab conquests sent shockwaves throughout the empire, and the loss of territories (and revenue) took its toll on the resources available to Constantinople. The imperial position in Italy was further aggravated by the estrangement between the imperial court in Constantinople and the popes in Rome, due first to Heraclius's religious policy, emphatically rejected by Rome,³ then to the truculence of Ravenna's taxing of the Church, which culminated in the exarch's plundering of the Lateran in 640 (*LP*, Vita Severini, 73.4). The exarch Isaac was disliked enough in the papal court that his later death was attributed to a 'divine strike' (*divino ictu*) (*LP*, Vita Theodori, 75.2).⁴ The military crisis in the homeland and the popularity crisis in the West eclipsed the imperial presence in Italy, as Constantinople gasped for air amongst renewed threats.

- 1 On Rothari, see Bognetti 1966–68, 303–23; Schneider 1972, 39–40; Frohlich 1980, 127–33; Delogu 1980, 54–82; 2001, 2009, 255–63; Wickham 1981, 35–37; Jarnut 1982, 57–58, 72–75, Christou 1991, 195–204; Christie 1995, 95–96, 114–25; Gasparri 2004, 43–49.
- 2 Stratos 1968, vol. 1, 135–44, 151–72, 197–234; Ostrogorsky 1980, 83–100; Haldon 1984, 169–71; 1997, 45–48; Howard-Johnston 1999; Kaegi 2003.
- 3 In 638 Heraclius published the *Ekthesis*, enforcing the view of a single will of God (*monothelema*) intending to solve the split between Chalcedonian and monophysite communities in the East. The solution of a single *thelema* was nonetheless rejected by several Chalcedonian churchmen, and only succeeded in deepening the divide (Ostrogorsky 1980, 96–98; Haldon 1986; Winkelmann 1987; Herrin 1987, 206ff.; Christou 1991, 198–204; Haldon 1997, 49).
- 4 He was, in all likelihood, not detested in Ravenna, where his sarcophagus lay—and still lies—in S. Vitale. On Isaac's death, see pp. 156–57.

Although the situation across the Alps was certainly better, the Frankish kingdom was also at the start of deepening political unrest (Ewig 1976b, 201–10; Geary 1988, 157–58; Wood 1994b, 160–64; Collins 2010, 273–74). Political stress and the lack of credibility gathered momentum under Dagobert (623–39), especially after the sound defeat at the hands of the Wends in 630 (the diligent Lombard king Arioald sent troops to support the Franks, reporting victory on his front) (Fred. 4.68; for Arioald's participation, see p. 144, n. 59). Probably as a consequence of the defeat, the Saxons were able to exchange the tribute they paid to the Franks (500 cows, according to Fredegar) for a guarantee to protect the border against the Wends (Fred. 4.74). The Saxons were the first of the periphery to drift away, but not the last: in 639, just after the death of Dagobert, the Thuringian duke Radulf rebelled against the eleven-year-old

Austrasian king Sigebert. The duke, with the support of Fara, a member of a prominent Austrasian aristocratic family, stood against the Austrasian army and obtained a great victory. Fredegar attributes the defeat to Sigebert's *adoliscencia*, his immaturity, although the shifting alliance of a part of the Austrasian army was probably to blame (Fred. 4.87). The defeat was a hard blow for the young king, and sent a vigorous message about Merovingian military capability, as Radulf extended his control of the right bank of the Rhine.

By the early 640s, the two foreign powers engaged in the Italian theater were temporarily knocked out of the game. To the East, Byzantium entered a long phase of struggles with Islam, which had already cost a large part of the imperial territories, including the fertile lands of the Levant and Egypt. A larger investment in Italy was arguably neither in the plans nor within the reach of the imperial government in the next two decades. A similar withdrawal from Italy could be argued for the Merovingians. The Franks had their strength absorbed by internecine competitions between aristocracies, in a process that eventually culminated with the triumph of the Pippinids in the early eighth century: until then, their resources to engage and control their periphery were few and thinly spread (Wood 1994b, 221–38). The new situation brought new possibilities for the Lombards to expand their rule beyond what would be in Frankish interest, digging more deeply into Byzantine possessions. What could be done with that opportunity depended on the capacity of the Lombard state to muster resources and on its efficiency in assimilating new territories.

The source material for Rothari's reign is slightly better than for the previous decades. Once Rothari came to power, he sponsored a renewed production of historical narratives. It is possibly this investment that produced the earliest surviving Lombard work of history, the *Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper*, a chronicle depicting the achievements of the previous kings, finished in 641.⁵ The *CH* was the first installment of a renewed attention to the past, which achieved maturity in the following years. Rothari's *Edict*, the first Lombard legal compilation, carries a strong mark of this rearrangement of history, focused on the royal institution and ethnic past. Another result of this second installment is the *Origo gentis Langobardorum* in its earlier—and now likely all but lost—format.⁶ Fredegar shares some information with the *Origo*, which may reach back to this original, suggesting this material circulated beyond the royal court. Rothari's *Edict* is in itself a type of evidence that the previous period lacks. The law code informs of details of the administration and the structure of the Lombard kingdom and sheds some light on society and culture. The use of the *Edict* is not, however,

without its risks. Although the Lombard laws, like their Visigothic counterparts, were intended for more than a formal display of power, they are normative rather than descriptive, and thus inform the scholar about its context only indirectly.

- 5 On the *Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper*, see Muhlberger 1984, 1998, 96–97; Borri 2014, 45–49; Hammer 2014, esp. 242, and more recently, Fabbro (forthcoming-b).
- 6 For an early composition of the *Origo* under Rothari, see Christie 1995, 73–74; Delogu 2009, 261. Pohl (2003b) has suggested the present form was finished under Perctarit (671–88), but also acknowledged a possible earlier version under Rothari (Pohl 2000a, 18, likewise Borri 2014, 49–54). More recently, Hammer (2014, 243) speculated about an ongoing compilation from an earlier date, which conflates into the *Origo* tradition different periods of historical production (namely, the production under Agilulf and the production under Rothari). The central issue behind these attempts to date the *Origo* is the later date of the manuscripts and the clear instability of the text; see Everett 2003, 92–98, for a different contextualization, see Bracciotti 1998, see also Pohl 2000b, and now, 2012; Plassmann 2006, 204–06; Coumert 2007, 153–57; Delogu 2009, 260–61; Borri 2014, 49–54.

Rothari, *rex Langobardorum*

Rothari used his newly found freedom to reform the Lombard monarchy, derelict since the civil war (pp. 139–44). Different from the official view of kingship under Agilulf, which comes up only indirectly, the Rothari's *Edict*, published in 643, provides a clear statement of the position the king envisioned for his office.⁷ Rothari claimed the legal compilation, comprising 388 laws including civil, criminal, and social matters, was an update on previous laws (*Rot. Prol.*). This 'previous material' has long attracted the attention of scholars, who inquired especially into the influences the Lombard laws received from other barbarian codes and Roman legislation. The nature of this material is, however, difficult to define, and scholars have long scrutinized the *Edict* for textual parallels with other legislation, ranging from pre- and post-Justinian legislation to Danish and Anglo-Saxon laws.⁸ Prominent amongst the noticeable textual influences are Justinian's *New Constitutions* and Visigothic laws, borrowed directly or, perhaps, through a Bavarian connection (Cavanna 1968, 274). Nonetheless, besides the Roman borrowings (which, as it is argued below, Rothari had good reason to keep visible on the surface), most of the associations with surviving legal material are indirect and hard to pin down, which explains the significant amount of dissenting scholarship on the subject. A possible solution is to see some of this influence being mediated by Francia: in the early

seventh century, the Frankish kings experimented with bestowing law codes for peoples on its periphery, such as the Bavarians and the Alamanni (Beyerle 1929, 1956; Wormald 1999, 41–44). It is suggested here that the initial stages of the Lombard laws, maybe even an early draft from which Rothari might have worked, came out of a similar process, which may account for the similarities with Bavarian and Alamannic laws (Paradisi 1968, esp. 21–31).

What previous material was used and the extent to which Rothari reworked it, however, remains speculative.⁹ Arguably, if Rothari was indeed working from a model designed for semi-independent regions such as Bavaria and Alammannia, he changed and included laws, especially concerning the specific needs of the monarchy, such as the role of the royal courts and *lèse-majesté*, amongst others. Independent monarchical power was thus firmly established and defended in the *Edict*. The king added a number of laws reinforcing the position of the king, such as *Rot* 1, which punished crimes of *lèse-majesté*, and *Rot* 2 (and 11), which excluded royal justice from claims of compensation.¹⁰ Other laws state the privileged position of lawsuits involving the king or his servant (e.g., *Rot* 369–74). Rothari was also concerned with maintaining the royal prerogative on coinage (*Rot* 242) and controlling the authorized copies of the *Edict* (*Rot* 388). In addition, the king established higher fines for *scandalum*, which should probably be glossed as ‘creating disturbance’, in his presence (*Rot* 36–37, especially in an army gathering, *Rot* 8). The core of this legislation adds fines and ensures the participation of royal courts in different situations, envisioning royal integration in a capillary level.¹¹

- 7 On law codes in general, see Wormald 1977, and more recently, 2003, see also the entries on various law codes in Erler, Kaufmann and Stammeler 1971, esp. vol. 2, 1607–1618 (s.v. langobardisches Recht), for Rothari’s *Edict*, see Gasparri 1992; Cortese 1999; Everett 2000, 2005; Dilcher 2006.
- 8 The best account of the earlier debate is still Cavanna 1968, esp. 270–81.
- 9 The philological argument proposed by Besta (1966 [1923]) and somewhat followed by Boggetti (1967a, 42) falls short of accounting for a more sophisticated re-elaboration of the text, which would in all likelihood erase obvious cases of cut and paste, such as the *si quis* entries. The solution adopted here was to focus on entries related to the main directives of the prologue—i.e., protect the poor and maintain peace—as those likely to have been innovations, especially if the legal prescriptions stand out in comparison with other contemporary laws.
- 10 Compare with *Leg. Alam.* 23, and with the lengthy exposition of possible excuses in *Lex Bau.* 2.1; 2.8. For a treatment of *lèse-majesté*, see Lear 1965, esp. 196–226 (for Alamanni and Bavarians) and 234–44 (for the Lombards).
- 11 For examples of royal claims to fines, see *Rot* 4, 8, 9, 13, 15, 18–22, 25–28, 37–39, 158–60, 162, 182, 185, 189, 191, 200, 209, 236, 238, 240, 244, 249, 251, 266–67, 279, 280, 369, 374, 376.

In addition to legal instructions concerning the royal office, the *Edict* was loaded with royal ideology. Most of this material is to be found, as usual, compressed in the prologue and the ‘epilogue’ (*Rot* 386) (Everett 2000, 2003, 164–77; 2012). The legitimacy of the *Edict* is reinforced by an extensive use of conventional legal jargon, whose intention is to contextualize the *Edict* within a larger framework of Roman legal traditions.¹² Much work has been done to highlight the extensive borrowing from Roman legislation in the *Edict*, and scholars have traced numerous references and expressions taken from previous Roman laws in the *Edict* (Besta 1952; Paradisi 1968; Cavanna 1968; Astuti 1975).¹³ The Roman elements in the prologue start with the careful dating of the document, a legal practice Constantine made mandatory in 322 (*C. Th.* 1.1.1). The dating is a curious mix of personal data on Rothari, such as his age, ‘national’ data on the Lombards, such as the year Alboin came to Italy, combined with the traditional Roman indiction (*Rot*, Prol.). In the prologue, Rothari made direct reference to earlier legislation, and most specifically to Justinian. The expression ‘which may renew and improve all the former laws, supply what is lacking and expunge what is unnecessary’ was taken verbatim from Justinian’s *Nov.* 7, while the idea of renewing legislation was borrowed from *Nov.* 78, 82 and also from the opening statement of the *Codex Iustinianus* (the constitution *Haec quae necessario*). The Christian tone is also omnipresent in the text.¹⁴ Rothari is represented as ruling according to divine providence (*Deo propitiante*), while the Lombards were guided into Italy by the power of God (*divina potentia adducti sunt*). *Rot* 2 (which maintains the king’s right to summary execution and protects those carrying out his wishes) also uses the Bible to ground the divine legitimacy of the royal rule, claiming ‘we believe that the hearts of kings are in the hand of God’, which echoes Proverbs, 21.1 (*Rot* 2; Everett 2000, 102–03). The legislative process, portrayed in the epilogue as a collection of traditions (Paradisi 1968, 23ff.), is described in the prologue as influenced by divine providence, with the ‘favor of God’ (*Deo propitio*) and the ‘help of divine clemency’ (*annuentem divinam clementiam*). Beyond Rothari’s legislative role and the weight of tradition, God is depicted as the driving force behind the codification.

¹² *Contra* Delogu 2001, who argued that Rothari relied strictly on the ‘national Lombard tradition’, see Dold 1955; Paradisi 1968, 3; Bischoff 1990, 191; Everett 2000, 100.

¹³ For a detailed list of the influences from Roman legislation, see Astuti 1975, 672–74; for a similar list relating the *Edict* with other so-called barbarian legislation, Besta 1952, 52–64.

¹⁴ Although the *Edict* stays clear of confessions of faith (Delogu 1980, 58).

Another element incorporated into the legitimacy of the codification is the army. '[O]ur most successful army' (*felicissimum exercitum nostrum*) is mentioned in the epilogue together with the 'all the main judges' (*primatos iudices cunctos*) agreeing with the new dispositions. The mention of the army and the mysterious *gairethinx*¹⁵ has led scholars to contextualize the *Edict* in a period in which the Lombards were still a 'popolo-esercito', some sort of archaic state of civilization in which an entire people is conceived as an army, and to suggest that Rothari was addressing his laws to this amalgam of army and people as an opposition to ducal power (Cortese 1988, 1999, 489–93; Everett 2005a, 349, n. 19; Pohl 2000a, 13–14, cf. Dilcher 2006). The presence of the army working as a corps in political decisions was a rather standard characteristic of the period, also referred to in Roman legislation, such as Justinian's *Novella* 8 and the *Pragmatica Sanctio* (§18), and even in the *Liber Pontificalis*, where, in many instances the army of Rome, in the very sense of Rothari's *felicissimum exercitum nostrum*, is mentioned vouching for the papal elections.¹⁶ Both in the papal and in the Byzantine context, it is clear that the mention of the army testifies to the growing presence of the army as a sector of society, and there is no compelling reason to suggest there was anything specifically Lombard about including the consent of the army as a guarantor of the legislative process.

15 *Gairethinx* seems to have been more a legal procedure used to authenticate certain actions than a proper assembly (Gasparrì 1986, 667).

16 For example, see *LP, Vita Benedicti II*, 83.3; *Vita Cononis*, 85. For the context, see Brown 1984, esp. 82–108. See also Paradisi (1968, 30), who considers the mention of the army another Roman *topos*.

Although no equivalent sources survived from Agilulf's reign, none of this material would seem out of place in his official propaganda. Also following in Agilulf's footsteps, Rothari's government relied on the appropriation of historical discourse. Rothari, however, seems to have shifted the scope of this past from recent glories to ancient tradition. In the *Edict*, this historical narrative marks the opening of the text in the form of a long list of Lombard kings and the commemoration of Alboin's creation of the kingdom in Italy, now outside living memory. The references to the Lombard past are repeated in the epilogue: here, the text claims the laws were put down from the 'ancient laws of our forefathers' (*antiquas legis patrum nostrorum*), recovered from what could be remembered by the royal court or by older men (*tam per nosmetipsos, quam per antiquos homines memorare potuerimus*) (*Rot* 386). Rothari capitalized on this 'ethnic' past as an additional source of legitimacy, much needed in a context in which a foreign political agent—the Byzantine emperor—still held

the monopoly of traditional forms of legitimacy.¹⁷ The ‘ethnic’ past could provide Rothari with further justification for his additions: in other words, the novelty of the *Edict* was dressed up as tradition. That invented tradition certainly does not rule out the possibility that many temporary solutions and conflict-solving strategies that had previously entered the legal practice were incorporated into the *Edict*, and could be seen as ‘ancient customs’.¹⁸ Those should, however, not detract from the fact that the traditional past in the *Edict* does not so much *inform* the new material as *justify* it.

The references to the past in the *Edict* were not the first historiographical effort of Rothari’s monarchy. The royal court was connected with the composition of the *Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper*, finished in 641 (p. 12, n. 11). The work, which takes Lombard history from Alboin to Adaloald, was crafted to provide a strong argument for unity and strong leadership, admonishing the readers of the risks of inept and weak leaders. The point with which the unknown author chose to conclude the narrative is particularly informative: *CH* finishes with a short statement on Adaloald, who ‘ruled with his mother for ten years’, taking the narrative to c.626. Notice, however, that Adaloald had ruled (*regnavit*) for the ten years, meaning the author, who elsewhere claims to be finishing his work in 641, knew of the civil war but chose not to include it. The omission suggests the legitimacy of the coup engendered by Arioald and Gundeperga was still contested in the early 640s and was best left untouched, especially considering the current regime was based on the same Gundeperga, now associated by marriage to Rothari. Unsurprisingly, the text favors legitimacy through efficiency, not family ties, allowing Arioald, and especially Rothari, to be seen as true kings since they *acted* as true kings. The author’s choice to end the narrative with Adaloald also makes it less likely that Rothari’s military victories happened before 641; otherwise, the *CH* would have had enough material to parade the king as the model it was advertising. More likely, the only significant military accomplishment Rothari had by 641 was the repression of segments of the aristocracy (Fred. 4.70.)—which might also be the origin of king’s need for propaganda favoring strong leadership over lineage in the first place.

17 On the complex interaction between Roman traditional expressions of power and the post-Roman kingdoms in the west, see McCormick 1986, 260–384.

18 These traditions were probably a kaleidoscope of legal practices, which combined ad hoc solutions, vulgar Roman laws, extra-official army regulations and customs brought from the most various backgrounds of the armies settled in Italy. To try to pin down this legal tradition, or to ascribe it to a unique ‘Germanic’ background, is to ignore the diversity of post-Roman cultural milieu.

The historical past fostered by the *Edict* is, however, of a different kind, and it supports the new image of the monarchy. The historical discourse behind the code supports the idea of the *gens Langobardorum* as a source for legitimacy: unlike Agilulf, who styled himself as *rex totius Italiae*, the *Edict* described Rothari as *rex gentis Langobardorum*, the first appearance of the title in official sources (*Rot. Prol.*).¹⁹ The use of the title remained limited to the prologues of law codes: the royal charters, at least in the format they survived, never adopt the qualification.²⁰ This disparity in the royal titles highlights the artificial nature of the national discourse in the law code. The ‘ethnic’ background plays a much more prominent role in the rhetoric of the *Edict* (and even greater in later Lombard legislation) than it played in society, or so the charters appear to show. Notwithstanding the prologue and epilogue, even in the *Edict* ethnicity seems to have played no role other than to provide further legitimacy for Rothari’s position: ethnic Lombards (whoever they were and how ever they could be so classified) received no special treatment under the law and ethnicity did not constitute a legal category (Pohl-Resl 1998, cf. Everett 2005a; Jarnut 2012). Furthermore, foreigners coming to the kingdom (whom the *Edict* calls *waregang*) were incorporated under the Lombard law, unless the king allowed them to maintain another legal tradition (*Rot* 367). Nonetheless, the *Edict*’s prologue proclaims that the founding moment of Lombard history was Alboin’s arrival in Italy: to this historical past, a genealogy is added, projecting the royal power back into a far away—and hence respectable—past. The genealogy that closes the prologue bears a resemblance to Ostrogothic ethnography (Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 9.25.4; cf. Jordanes, *Getica*, 14.79–81), suspiciously listing the same number of kings, seventeen.²¹ Rothari introduced an innovation, however, by acknowledging that the Lombard kings came from different families, which he dutifully added to the list.²² The maneuver fitted Rothari’s own claim to the throne, which was not dynastic; it is also tempting to suggest that the list provided a place to honor prominent aristocratic families which, in all likelihood, counted living members among the supporters of the king. The list of kings was eventually expanded into a collection of short narratives, the *Origo gentis Langobardorum*.²³ This brief regnal history seems to have been reworked a few times before it came to the texts in the surviving manuscripts. Although it is impossible to untangle the different layers of edition, the historiographical reformulation that accompanied the *Edict* constituted the basic layer of the work.

19 For the use of ethnic titles in legal codes, see Wormald 1977, 107; Gillett 2002b (for the Lombards, 112–13).

- 20 See the collected royal charters in *CDL* 3. The absence of the ethnic title was already remarked by Chroust (1888, 28–31, also Brühl 1970). The Lombard royal title in charters is consistently *Flavius...vir excellentissimus rex*, from the first king whose charter was preserved (Agilulf) to the last king (Desiderius). There is, however, no surviving charter from Rothari.
- 21 On the Ostrogothic ethnographic tradition and the Amal's genealogy, see Wolfram 1967, 99–101; Amory 1997; Søby Christensen 2002, 125–34; Hammer 2014, 245, 255–56.
- 22 Cf. the five aristocratic families singled out in the *Lex Bau*. 3. On post-Roman genealogies, in general, see Dumville 1977; Murray 1983, 99–108.
- 23 I do not see evidence for Hammer's suggestion that, instead of the *Origo* being an expansion of the prologue, the prologue was an abridgment of the *Origo*; see Hammer 2014, 244, n. 31.

Rothari's wars

As was the case with Agilulf, the waning of Frankish and Byzantine power in Italy during the 640s allowed Rothari not only to strengthen the royal position but also to resume the military expansion. At some point during his reign, Rothari launched an offensive campaign against the Byzantine forces, the first on record since the peace established by Agilulf. Scholarship has often associated the beginning of Rothari's campaigns with the promulgation of his *Edict* in November 643.²⁴ It is possible (but not necessary) that Rothari launched his campaign around the same time the *Edict* was published, but the traditional argument stretches the evidence (as argued on, pp. 155–59). In any case, scholars consider Rothari's campaigns tremendously successful and ascribed to him a considerable increase in the limits of the kingdom (e.g., Wickham 1981, 37; Delogu 1980, 60–61; Jarnut 1982, 57–58; the exception is Christou 1991, 195). Rothari's success, however, does not withstand scrutiny. Dismissing the connection between the *Edict* and Rothari's campaigns removes any possibility of an accurate chronology, but the sources suggest that, at some point in his reign, Rothari seized the opportunity created by the dwindling presence of the Franks and the chaos in the empire to expand his influence, grasping territories nominally controlled by Ravenna. The campaign is attested both in Fredegar and in the *Origo* (see [Table 5.1](#)).

Table 5.1 Sources on Rothari's Campaigns

<i>Fred. 4.71</i>	<i>Origo c. 6</i>
Rothari and his army, capturing from the empire the coastal cities of Genoa, Albignano, Varicotti, Savona, 'Ubitergium' and Luni, devastated and demolished them, setting them on fire; he took away the people, plundered them, and	And after Ariold Rothari, from the Arodus family, ruled. He destroyed the Roman city and fortress that were around the shore of Luni up to, in the land of the Franks, 'Ubitergium' to the east. He also fought around the river Scultenna,

commanded them to captivity. Destroying [where] eight thousand soldiers from the the walls of those cities we mentioned Roman army died.
down to the foundations, he commanded
those cities to be henceforth called
hamlets.

Archeology, however, has found so far little confirmation of the levels of destruction (suggested mainly by Fredegar) in Liguria (Balzaretti 2013, 45–53). The archeology points instead to abandonment and repurposing. There is indeed evidence for a shift in settlement in the 640s, but the changes seem to have happened within a framework of continuous patterns of distribution of material culture, indicating gradual change, not a rupture. Some Ligurian cities did disappear in the mid-seventh century, but in general the archeological material points to the end of a long decline and stagnation. Luni is the best-excavated site: the city, which was indeed abandoned in the period, was not a victim of the Lombards, but rather of climate change.²⁵ In addition to that, no signs of destruction have been found on the Byzantine *castra* on the shoreline, and most of them appeared to have had similar fates to Sant’Antonino (one of the best-excavated sites), which was abandoned in the 640s (Mannoni and Murialdo 2001, esp. Murialdo’s conclusion, 789–93; Balzaretti 2013, 55). It is more likely that the Byzantine troops were evacuated from Liguria and moved to Ravenna in the aftermath of Arab incursions in the East, in an attempt to concentrate the available military resources. The evacuation of troops seems to be confirmed by the presence of a *numerus Laetus* or *Laetorum* in Ravenna, a unit stationed in Genoa back in the 590s.²⁶ Rothari thus moved in to claim an abandoned territory, plundering his way up to the sea: he may indeed have pulled down the city walls, as Fredegar suggests, to demilitarize the region—yet another sign the king was not overly confident in keeping them. Rothari launched a second expedition southward towards Emilia, in which, crossing the River Panaro (Scultenna), he captured Arezzo (*CDL* 1.19), and ended up clashing with remaining Byzantine troops on the way to Ravenna. Even though the *Origo* celebrates the battle as a major victory, in which the Byzantines lost 8,000 soldiers, it does not seem that Rothari gained much from it. The battle opened the doors to a few cities in Emilia, but no imposition of tribute is recorded, nor territorial gains, neither a siege of Ravenna—achievements that pale in comparison to Agilulf’s winning streak in the 600s.

24 E.g., Hartmann 1897a, 234; Wickham 1981; Christie 1990; Jarnut 1982, 58; Christou 1991, 195; Capo 1992, 524–25.

25 On Luni, see Ward-Perkins 1981; Lusuardi Siena 1985, and more recently,

2006; Delano Smith et al. 1986; Christie 1990; Balzaretto 2013, 48–49. On the possible connection between climate change and the decline of the city, see Fazzini and Maffei 2000.

- 26 The *numerus* is referred to in Agnellus, c. 140 (for a muster in 710); it was formerly in Genoa in an inscription of 591 (CIL V,2 7771 = ILCV 550) (Brown 1984, 90; Christie 1990, 264–65).

Lombard society under Rothari

Although the *Edict* was a platform for the propaganda of the renewed regime, Rothari also used the legal reform to tackle current problems in Lombard society and, amongst other things, to address social issues that had a bearing on the organization of the army. This section tackles the connections between the *Edict* and mid-seventh-century Lombard society and inquires into the intended social impact of the code.

A military harangue?

Before a closer analysis of the intent of the laws, it is important to review the evidence for the Rothari's *Edict* as military propaganda (or plot) linked to the king's campaigns in Liguria (e.g., Gasparri 2012, 44; Jarnut 2012, 96). The theory contends that the *Edict* was devised to support the campaigns against the Byzantine forces, as a binding agreement used to unify the Lombards and boost morale (esp. Bertolini 1953; Bognetti 1966b). In the most extreme version of this idea, Bognetti has suggested the entire thing was a ruse: Rothari wanted to call all the banners to attack the Byzantines, and a general assembly to approve the *Edict* was the perfect way to do it without raising suspicion (Bognetti 1966b). The text of the *Edict*, however, hardly works as a military harangue. The theory rests on two bases: first, on the alleged chronological coincidence between the publication of the code in November 643 and Rothari's campaigns. The renewed aggression against the Byzantines, goes the argument, happened immediately after the promulgation of the *Edict*: after harvest and before the winter, as one commentator suggests (Bognetti 1966b, 133). Such dating of the campaign depends on the death of the exarch Isaac, who was purportedly killed in battle against the Lombards, by the river Scultenna, referred to in the *Origo* (c. 6)—note, however, that no Byzantine commander is mentioned therein. The dating for Isaac's death relies, in its turn, on his sarcophagus in San Vitale (Ravenna), whose dedication claims Isaac served the 'serene princes for three times six years', and that he died a 'glorious death' (τούτου θανόντος ευχλῆως, *Corpus Insc. Graec.* IV, 1877). These eighteen years of

service must have fallen between the end of Adaloald's reign (*Ep. Lang.* 2, see pp. 139–40). When pope Honorius sent a letter to him as exarch, and the pontificate of Theodorus (642–49), when the *LP* states Isaac died (*LP*, Vita Theodori, 75.2). Ottorino Bertolini suggested that if Isaac became exarch in 625 (the year Honorius's letter is usually dated) and ruled for eighteen years, he probably died in 643, the same year of the promulgation of the code. The mention of a 'glorious death', he adds, could only mean that he died in battle: the confrontation involving 8,000 Byzantine soldiers, mentioned by the *Origo* (*Origo*, c. 6; cf. *HL* 4.45), would have been the perfect occasion for such a death. In an engagement of this magnitude, the argument proceeds, the exarch was likely present, and there he was killed; the Byzantines, however, were able to stall Rothari's advances towards Ravenna, and hence Isaac's death was portrayed as 'glorious' (Bertolini 1953). Hence, the 'glorious death' in 643 was the result of Rothari's campaigns, which, in turn, must have followed the publication of the *Edict* in the same year.

This concatenation, however, linking the publication of the *Edict* (which can be dated) to Rothari's campaigns (which cannot) is speculative at best. The dating of Isaac's death depends on several estimates and is, consequently, less precise than Bertolini lets out. The date depends on Isaac's tombstone (*Corpus Insc. Greac.* IV, 1877)—which mentions he served for eighteen years—together with the letter Isaac received from Honorius (*Ep. Lang.* 2), which, *if* dated to 625, suggests the exarch died in 643, the same year of the promulgation of the *Edict*. Honorius's letter, however, contains no date, and is instead placed approximately at the very end of Adaloald's reign, whose dates are also uncertain. The only absolute date is the accession of Rothari, which happened eight years before the publication of his *Edict* in November 643; as a result, Rothari became king in 635 (or 636?). The dates for Adaloald and Arioald depend on the date of accession of Rothari combined with the time each king is supposed to have ruled. The length of their reigns, however, is not a given, as different sources offer different regnal dates: Adaloald supposedly ruled for ten years (*Origo codicis Gothanis*, c. 6; *HL* 4.41; *CH* 1556), but maybe only six years (*Origo*, c. 6); after him, Arioald ruled for twelve (*Origo*, c. 6; Paul the Deacon, *HL* 4.42) or ten years (*Origo codicis Gothani*, c. 6). Hence, according to Paul, Arioald came to power in 623/4, and Adaloald in 613/14; for the *Origo*, however, Arioald came to power in 623/4 and Adaloald in 617/18; the *Origo cod. Got.* suggests 625/6 for Arioald and 619/20 for Adaloald. And these dates suppose *one* source had *all* the correct dates, but it is not unlikely that one author had one correct date and the other author one wrong, which produces an even larger number of possible chronologies. To further complicate the matter, the

earliest of the two surviving charters emitted by Adaloald (*CDL* 3.2) is dated to the fifteenth indiction (i.e., 627), said to be the twelfth year of his rule,²⁷ meaning Honorius's letter to Isaac could be dated later than 627. In short, to suggest Isaac's death can be dated precisely to 643, although convenient, is misleading. Furthermore, the *Liber Pontificalis* indeed places Isaac's death after a triumph—he had just defeated the usurpation of Maurice, whose head he paraded in the circus, and was in the middle of the process of judging his collaborators. To the papal chancellery, however, Isaac died by a *divino ictu*, which given his age would arguably relate to some acute health condition, not an undisclosed military draw with the Lombards (*LP*, *Vita Theodori*, 75.2).

²⁷ Brühl, the editor, contested this date, given that in the indiction the 'quinta' was a correction added to the 'decima' and he dismissed the corrector in principle, suggesting the correct number should be any indiction but the one suggested by the corrector, dating thus the charter from the eleventh to the fourteenth (i.e., 623 to 626); there is no reason, in this case, to dismiss the corrector altogether. In any case, *CDL* 3.2 does little to clarify the debate; the date in *CDL* 3.3 is missing.

The second piece of evidence for a military background to the *Edict* comes from the final lines of the prologue, which allude to the purpose of the laws. The passage, however, is in a rather cryptic Latin: *In unum previdimus volumine conplectendum, quatinus liceat unumquemque salva lege et iustitia quiete vivere, et propter opinionem contra inimicos laborare, seque suosque defendere fines* (Rot, Prol., emphasis added)

The coincidence of 'inimicos' and 'defendere fines' has led scholars to read the passage as an exaltation of martial values. In the most recent translation, that passage reads:

Vogliamo che sia riunito tutto in un volume, perché sia consentito a ciascuno vivere in pace nelle legge e nella giustizia e con questa consapevolezza impegnarsi contro i nemici e diffendere se stesso e il proprio paese

(Azzara and Gasparri, *Leggi*, 13, emphasis added)²⁸

The meaning, according to a recent commentator, would be that: [the traditional customs turned into legislation] were meant to ensure the Lombard people's welfare and peace. In return for his care, the king expected loyal obedience from his subjects, and their common solidarity in the war against the enemies of the kingdom

(Delogu 2009, 256)

The Latin hardly supports such a translation and deserves a closer look, starting with the meaning of *propter opinionem contra inimicos laborare*. In Lombard sources, *opinio*, which is commonly conveyed as ‘willfully’, is closer to ‘fame’ or ‘reputation’.²⁹ ‘Honor’ is probably the best translation. Thus, the law allowed anyone to ‘strive for [the sake of] honor’ against *inimicos*, enemies. *Inimicus*, elsewhere in the code, together with its byproducts (esp. *inimicitia*), is used both in the sense of external enemies and in the sense of domestic opponents at court.³⁰ The *Edict*, however, although it indeed mentions external enemies, is mostly concerned with solving internal conflict, which consumes most of the volume. This imbalance suggests the *inimicos* were more likely legal adversaries, and not the Byzantines or the Franks. Additionally, the legislator chose *laborare* (instead of *pugnare* or *praevalere*, for example), and it is relatively clear that he meant ‘to work’, in the sense of ‘strive for’, an odd choice if the legislator intended military actions abroad. Hence, *inimicos* translates better as ‘challengers’, in the court sense.

- ²⁸ The translation suggested by Beyerle (1962, vol. 1, 5, emphasis added) is not much different: ‘[Und]in ein Ganzes wollten Wir’s zusammenfassen, auf daß ein jeder nach Gesetz und Recht sein friedlich Leben führe und *im Vertrauen darauf sich [desto williger] gegen den Feind einsetze, sich und sein [Heimat-]Land verteidige*.’ In the only available English translation: ‘We desire that these laws be brought together in one volume so that everyone may lead a secure life in accordance with law and justice, and in confidence thereof will *willingly set himself against his enemies and defend himself and his homeland*.’ (Drew 1973, 39, emphasis added).
- ²⁹ The classical usage allows for *opinio* as ‘belief’, ‘rumor or fancy’ or ‘reputation’. For the post-classical usage, *opinio* is used as ‘fame’ (*fama*) and ‘reputation’ (*existimatio*), or ‘report’ (*nuntius*) and ‘rumor’ (*rumor*). In the Lombard legal vocabulary, it usually is used to mean ‘reputation’. According to Du Cange, *opinio* has two different meaning in post-Classical Latin: it can mean *fama*, *existimatio* or it can mean *rumor*, *fama*, *nuntius* (cf. Niemeyer, *opinio*: ‘repute, fame’). The word is not common in Lombard law codes: it was used twice, once by Liutprand (8.2: ‘Testis uero ipsi tales sint, quorum *opinio* in bonis precellat operibus’ [emphasis added]), and once by Ratchis (8.4: ‘Quod nobis et nostris iudicibus durum esse comparuit, quia, qui pro *opinionem* suam iurare nolebat, dabat pro sacramentum suum aliquid, et habebat damnietatem sine causa’ [emphasis added]). Both cases bear the meaning of ‘fame, reputation’.
- ³⁰ External enemies: *Rot* 4, 7; internal enemy: *Rot* 45 (‘*faida, hoc est inimicitia*’), 143, 326, (cf. *LLIut* 119.3).

Conversely, the prologue claims that the laws would allow one to ‘se suosque defendere fines’. Scholars have consistently translated ‘suos fines’ as the borders of the country,³¹ which would complement the sense of *inimicos* as foreign aggressors. This reading, however, also goes against the text: if the author meant the borders of the country, the legislator would not use *suos* as a modifier—at best, he would

have opted for *nostros*.³² Taking into account the material in the *Edict*, it is more likely that with *suos fines* the legislator intended ‘his [own] limits’, i.e., the limits of one’s property, which looks back to the original sense of *limes* (as ‘threshold’).³³ Thus, ‘se suosque defendere fines’ can be rendered as ‘to protect themselves (*se*) and the threshold [of their property]’. The passage could be rendered thus:

- 31 Azzara & Gasparri: ‘il proprio paese’; Beyerle: ‘sein Heimatland’; Drew: ‘homeland’.
- 32 In the two instances in which *fines* is used for the borders of the country, the word is qualified either by ‘provinciae’ (*Rot* 264: ‘Si liber aut servus vellit foris provincia fugire, et iudex aut quicumque, qui in *finibus provinciae* resedit em praeserit’) or by ‘exteras’ and ‘regni nostri’ (in *Rot* 367: ‘Omnes uuaregang, qui de exteris fines in *regni nostri finibus* advenerint’, emphasis added); compare with Ratchis’s *Rat.* 13, which uses ‘marca’ for border.
- 33 See Lewis and Short’s definition of *limes* as ‘a cross-path, balk between fields’, and also the definition in Just. *Inst.* 1.12.5 ‘limina sicut in domibus finam quondam faciunt’. As the prologue states, Rothari was concerned about the ‘superfluas exactiones’ from the rich, so he is set to protect the property of everyone; there is clear legislation protecting actual markers of *fines*, that is, fences and signposts; see *Rot* 236, 238–41. In addition to that, the *Edict* protects private *curtes* (32–34, 277–78), and limits private property in general (e.g., 269–76, 281–302).

We have made provision to encompass in one volume how it may be permitted to anyone—provided the law and justice are served—to live in peace and to strive for honor against [legal] challengers, and to protect themselves and the threshold [of their property].

Thus, what the legislator is advocating is that, to maintain reputation and safeguard property, people could now rely on the *Edict*, neatly assembled in one single volume, instead of the ad hoc solution of the *faida*, a practice the *Edict* strives to suppress or, at least, contain.

The torments of the poor

The *Edict* thus had more to do with internal problems in Lombard society than with an upcoming military campaign. The prologue actually provides a valuable insight into those issues, revealing the king’s perception of the current social conditions. The highly rhetorical tone of the prologue (and also of the epilogue, *Rot* 386) has led scholars to ignore the simple fact that the key to the *Edict* is not in secret agendas or hidden elements in the text,³⁴ but is instead plainly, albeit rhetorically, stated in the text. The prologue indeed introduces the reasons for the legal collection, highlighting Rothari’s intentions, and it would be expected that the guidelines presented there permeated the collection. This statement can be divided in three

sections, namely, the problem to be addressed (1); the legal operation to address it (2); and the expected results (3):

[1] The contents added below reveal how much was, and how much it is still, our concern for the *well being of our subjects*; especially on account not only of *the constant burdens of the poor*, but also *the undue demands of those with greater power*; such poor, we have learnt, suffer from abuse of power. [2] For this reason, and taking into account the grace of God, we have regarded it necessary *to correct the present law, which may renew and improve all the former laws, supply what is lacking and expunge what is unnecessary*. [3] We have made provision to encompass in one volume how it may be permitted to anyone—provided the law and justice are served—to live in peace and to strive for honor against [legal] challengers, and to protect themselves and the threshold [of their property].

(*Rot*, Prol., emphasis added)

The prologue claimed that the king took notice of the constant suffering of the poor and the abuse of the powerful (1), which prompted him to alter the existing law (2) so that all his subjects could lead a peaceful life, solve their conflicts in peace, and protect themselves and properties (3). He expected that fixing the law would allow peace while acknowledging that the suffering of the poor at the hands of the powerful was increasing social conflict and violence, a situation he expected the laws could mitigate. Even though the role of the *Edict* as a ‘strumento di pace e di unificazione politica’ has long been accepted by scholarship (e.g., Delogu 1980, 55; Jarnut 1982, 71; Cammarosano 1998, 58), the concern with the poor has been dismissed as a literary *topos* (Paradisi 1968, 21–22, compare with *Haec* const. §3, and the epilogues for the *JNov.* 78 and 82). Instead, the cause of the growing restlessness in Lombard society has been attributed to the breakdown of traditional values and the corrosion of Lombard ‘tribal society’ by acculturation (e.g., Njeussychin 1948, 108–11; Delogu 1980, 83–84). Yet, neither the prologue nor any other contemporary documentation supports such idea. On the contrary, the prologue plainly associates the current conditions with the suffering of the poor and the oppression of the powerful. One should not, however, be led to believe that Rothari’s poor are the miserable and destitute: the focus of the laws is a class of landowners whose property, as argued below, was in jeopardy. The king was not concerned with the utterly destitute, the rural workers of various levels of dependency and servitude, whose unrest, whenever it caught the eyes of the legislator, was invariably dealt with in terms of violent suppression (e.g., *Rot* 279–80). It is possible to envision Rothari’s ‘poor’ instead as a segment of landowners that, impoverished, faced

increasing oppression from more successful members of that same group, including (but not limited to) holders of higher offices such as dukes, *gastaldii*, and *iudices*. The contents of the laws support that claim, given that a good part of the *Edict* was dedicated to regulate inheritance and protect property, arguably from dilapidation by debt, and to provide mediation for conflict.³⁵

34 As often suggested: e.g., Bognetti 1966b; Gasparri 1992, xii–xiv; 1997, 151; Pohl-Reisl 1998, 208, cf. Delogu 2001, 339–42; Everett 2003, esp. 163–96. For the political uses of the *Edict*, see pp. 148–55).

35 On property (including rights over slaves and *aldiones*, and *mundio*): *Rot* 29, 32–34, 75–136, 148–50, 152–74, 205–09, 223–41, 253–76, 278, 281, 284–302, 315–22, 332–34, 337–58, 385 (= 193 laws); on debt (including sacraments): *Rot* 245–52, 359–64, 365–66 (= 16 laws); on violence and social strife: *Rot* 10–16, 19, 26–28, 30–31, 35–75, 138–42, 277 279–80, 307–08, 330–31, 368, 382–84, 387 (= 71 laws, for a total of 280 laws out of 388). Laws dealing especially with *inimicitia*: *Rot*, 45, 75, 138, 188–90, 214, 326.

Thus, Rothari was concerned with a split in Lombard society between the impoverished free Lombard families and the wealthier ones, who had managed to profit from the situation. On one side, some families arguably struggled to maintain their status as landowners and as soldiers, and to perform the myriad of social niceties demanded of a freeman to safeguard his reputation (Rothari's 'opinio'), such as giving and returning gifts, displaying the proper apparel, and so forth (Wickham 2009, 131–34). On the other side, other families advanced towards social prominence, presumably competing with one another. The overall economic conditions suggest those families were more likely to have simply better weathered the economic downturn than to have actually become significantly more prosperous, as throughout the period Italian aristocracies remained modestly wealthy (Wickham 2005, 203–19). The overall result was a growth in social violence, which Rothari attempted to prevent by increasing fines and mandating conciliation (in particular through composition) (*Rot* 45; 74). Finally, the increasing demand on the productive sector of society (viz. the un-free and semi-free population), in all likelihood by both richer and poorer families, led to revolt and rebellion, which Rothari promptly outlawed (*Rot* 279–80).

Ceramica longobarda and the Italian economy

The impoverishment of significant sectors of Lombard society seems to have been a novelty in the mid-seventh century. Since the taxation system established during the early settlement had collapsed, the Lombard military families had transitioned from soldiers quartered

around cities to local landowners, acquiring low-priced lands (often, possibly, through extortion—see [Chapter 3](#)). The process produced a class of landowning military families that provided the muscle for Agilulf's successful campaigns against rebel dukes and the Byzantines from the 590s to the 610s. This rearrangement of the productive forces prompted a temporary recovery in the later sixth and early seventh century: since production then supported the army directly, taxation disappeared, allowing the stagnant productive sector a little more breathing space. That small surplus was likely boosted by rewards from Agilulf's profitable wars and the tributes the king managed to collect from Rome and Ravenna, which presumably trickled down to the troops as donatives and other rewards (see [Chapter 4](#)).

This recovery can probably be noticed from the spread of the ceramic style usually called *ceramica longobarda* (or *ceramica comune*), a style consisting of decorated small vessels found in northern Italy (Wickham 2005, 731; 2000, 821–22).³⁶ The *ceramica longobarda* appeared in the late sixth century (usually dated to the advent of the Lombards in 568) and spread across the Po Valley. The distribution follows the pattern of weapon burials in the region, comprising ducal seats such as Cividale, the large traditional urban centers (Verona, Bergamo, Brescia, Mantua, Milan), and the areas around Lake Como and Varese. It was also common in fortified centers (and present in tombs and settlements such as Sirmione, Castelseprio, Calvisano, Nosate, Sacaldasole, Testona, amongst others), and in rural settlements and graveyards (especially at important crossroads, such as Arsago Seprio, Sesto Calende, Varedo, Boffalora d'Adda, Castellanza, Botticino, Milzanello, Manerbio, Erbusco). The *ceramica longobarda* becomes rare as one moves south of the Po Valley towards central and southern Italy (De Marchi 2003, 16–18; 2007, 287–88). The shape, dimensions, and composition all suggest the vessels were used as tableware, to serve beverages (Hessen 1971, 763; Lavazza and Vitali 1994, 18–25; De Marchi 2007, 281). The style resembles handmade pots found in sixth-century Pannonia (which led scholars to label this *ceramica* as *longobarda*, inferring the Lombards had brought it from Pannonia to Italy); different from the Pannonian findings, the Italian wares were professionally made on a wheel, resulting in a fine ware with elegant finishing, 'located at the top end of the market', as Chris Wickham describes them (Wickham 2005, 731). It is worth noting that the *ceramica longobarda* was produced and consumed locally (De Marchi 2003, 18; Wickham 2005, 731; De Marchi 2007, 288), and often sites in which the *ceramica longobarda* is specially abundant can be traced back to older production centers (Sfredda and Tassinari 1998), whose output of traditional ceramic presumably gave

way to the new style.

- 36 For production and distribution, Lavazza and Vitali 1994; Brogiolo and Gelichi 1997, 1998; for the characteristics, Brogiolo et al. 1996; for a detailed description of the decoration, see De Marchi 2003, 14–15.

Both the local production and the adaptation of previous structure point to a new consumer market at the regional level. Despite its quality, the style is not found in extremely wealthy graves (which tended to favor imported vessels), suggesting the consuming group was of relatively good social standing but not an aristocracy. The *ceramica longobarda* attests to the economic development of the early seventh century: the style, distribution, and quality of the *ceramica longobarda* suggest it catered to the now well-established Lombard soldiers. Throughout the Po Valley, the acquisition of land, together with the profits from Agilulf's wars, endowed the Lombard military families with enough surpluses to support a professional industry of fine tableware. This type of ceramic specifically targeted soldiers, by copying a style that had been popular in their Danubian homeland. (For the composition of the Lombard army, see [Chapter 1](#).) The *ceramica longobarda* provides a useful indicator of the growth in prosperity of the Lombard soldiers and the positive outcomes of Agilulf's campaigns. This presumed connection between the prosperity of the Lombard military households and the distribution of the *ceramica longobarda* has a further implication: given that the industry producing this style was intimately connected to the prosperity of the settled Lombard soldiers, the *ceramica longobarda* serves as a 'miner's canary' for the economic health of this segment of society. For as long as this group had enough surplus, they could support a professional industry of fine wares, with dedicated workers, ovens, and so on. If the surplus shrank below a certain level, this industry would become unsustainable and collapse, giving way to rougher, less professional wares.

The Lombard canary died around 650. At the time, the *ceramica longobarda* disappeared, together with the few imported products that still reached Italy. There was still a demand for ceramics, but what was available, according to the archeological finds, was coarse pottery, even if some of it was still wheel-made (Brogiolo and Gelichi 1998, 224–25; Wickham 2005, 732; 2000, 823). Such a change in technique, argued Brogiolo and Gelichi, attests to a change in the 'apparati produttivi' of the region, which suggests that ceramics, as an independent industry, had collapsed (Brogiolo and Gelichi 1998, 225). The simplicity of the new products indicates their origin in unspecialized domestic ateliers. Even though the disappearance of the

ceramica longobarda agrees with the Mediterranean-wide gradual simplification of ceramics observed in the *longue durée* (c.300–700) (McCormick 2001, esp. 27–63; Wickham 2005), scholars have wondered why it happened to the *ceramica longobarda* in the mid-seventh century. Chris Wickham remarked that ‘nothing was going wrong with the Lombard polity around then’ and suggested that ‘global demand must have decreased; it may well be that c.650 simply marked another catastrophe-flip, when falling demand finally made it impossible to carry on professional ceramic production any longer’ (Wickham 2005, 732). Wickham is probably right when he suggests the disappearance of the *ceramica longobarda* represents a reduction in demand, but he was misled looking for political reasons. The lot of the *ceramica longobarda* was closely connected to the prosperity of the military households, whose output generated a market for fine wares in the first place. The distribution of ceramics, hence, suggests that this affluence came to a halt at some point after Agilulf, impoverishing the military households and sending the ceramics industry crashing down in its wake—a picture that clearly converges with the reading of the prologue suggested above.

Both archeological and legal sources point to economic involution and to the end of the prosperity the Lombard households had enjoyed under Agilulf (590–616). Thereafter, there were no more external campaigns on the scale of those of the previous decades. Apart from the internal conflict of unknown proportions in the late 620s between Adaloald (c.616–26) and Arioald (c.626–36), the sources are silent on military activities after the first years of Arioald (see pp. 137ff.). In the same period, Arioald (c.626–36), Fredegar suggests, renegotiated the tribute received from Ravenna, reducing it to two-thirds of what it was under Adaloald (Fred. 4.69). This demobilization of the army arguably reduced the flow of booty and gifts from the king, leaving the soldiers to be supported by their recently acquired family properties. Even though irregular private expeditions could produce some extra money,³⁷ most soldiers had to rely on the outcomes of the severely debilitated Italian economy. The end of taxation certainly allowed producers to retain a larger portion of the surplus than previously, but it was still not enough to compensate for the structural weaknesses, in particular for the endemic lack of manpower. The fact that the new landholding class brought a warlike mentality and a penchant for symbolic displays of wealth presumably did not improve the already overburdened economic output (Wickham 2005, 200–01; Halsall 2007, 455–98, cf. Pohl 1998).

By the 640s, when Rothari was working on his law code, the Lombard households were noticeably impoverished, and the disappearance of the *ceramica longobarda* attests to their diminished

purchasing power and the resulting drop in demand. Taking into consideration this evolution, it becomes clear that this reduction in demand is the final development of a prolonged crisis that had been postponed by the elimination of taxes in the late sixth century and by the profits of the successful wars of the 590s and 600s. By mid-century, Lombard landholders were poorer than their parents. The legal efforts in Rothari's *Edict* to handle this growing impoverishment confirm the archeological data. Considering Rothari's interventions, it becomes clear he intended to safeguard the property of the military households, both from dilapidation in inheritance and by confiscation on account of debt.

37 The organization of private campaigns is hinted at in *Rot* 167.

The Lombard army

Rothari's concern with the impoverishment of the middling class was, however, not motivated by his compassion for the torments of the actual poor (who figure quite briefly in the law), but instead by the threat it posed to the organization of the army. This section shows the connection between land and service, first analyzing the military service and the basis of conscription, then looking at the impact of the growing inequality in the mechanisms behind the army, and finally reviews the evidence for private forces.

Military service

Military obligation was a long-standing feature of the Roman Empire and, even if the zeal with which the state imposed it varied, it is safe to assume there had always been a part of the population subjected to conscription (Whitby 1995). The same seems to be the case for the barbarian kingdoms in the West, although the criteria might have varied widely (Halsall 2003, 40–118; Petersen 2013, 149–255; Goffart 1982, 2008; Bachrach 1972, 1993, 2001). It was argued above that the Lombard state enlisted for the army initially through an association of military obligation with the allocation of a share of the taxes (see [Chapter 2](#)), and that, eventually, military service was associated with specific military families (as suggested in [Chapter 3](#)). In Lombard law, military service revolves around *exercitales*: the name, a post-Roman neologism³⁸ connected to *exercitus*, the army, possibly meant 'enlisted soldiers' (Bertolini 1968; Tabacco 1969; Gasparri 1986).³⁹ The references for *exercitales* are, nonetheless,

meager: the term is mentioned in five laws, four from the seventh century.⁴⁰ Of these references, three are found in the section that deals with military discipline (*Rot* 20–25), a series of six laws comprising the fundamental legislation related to military affairs, of which *Rot* 20, 23, and 24 explicitly mention *exercitales*. These laws establish some essential rules for the assembled army, such as the due process involving property (*Rot* 25) and the judicial rights of the duke (*Rot* 20). They also reinforce the balance of power between the duke, as a military commander, and the *gastaldius* (*Rot* 23–24). In addition to those laws, the *Edict* deals elsewhere with rebellion (*Rot* 6) and desertion (*Rot* 7), both punishable by death.

- 38 Besides the relatively common use in Lombard legislation and charters, the term is also found in Visigothic legislation, see *Lib. Iud.* 9.2.9 (681). By the Carolingian period, *exercitalis* is commonly used as an adjective to qualify military activities and services, especially in phrases such as ‘iter exercitale’. See, for example, in chronicles: *Annales Mettensis prioris*, ad a. 792 (‘Eodem anno nullum iter exercitale factum est’); in legal material: Hludowici Pii Capitularia, n. 185 (‘omnes homines per totum regnum nostrum, qui exercitalis itineris debitores sunt’). Cf. Cass. *Variae*, 11.1 ‘exercitualem virum’.
- 39 And not ‘member of a “Germanic” *Gefolgschaft*’, *contra* Mor 1958, 278 On *exercitales*, the classic works are now Bertolini 1968, 451–81; Tabacco 1969, 228–46. Based on eighth-century evidence, Tabacco suggests that the *exercitales* were bound to the king by an oath; but there is no evidence of such practice in the earlier sources. The correlation of *exercitales* and freemen is also more a reality of the material from the eighth century than from the seventh, and should not be used anachronistically; *contra* Delogu 1996, 290; Gasparri 1986, 666–70; 2012, 42–47.
- 40 Namely, *Rot* 20, 23, 24 & 373; *Liut* 62 (724); the title appears in a handful of eighth-century charters and is prominent amongst the witnesses interviewed in a royal *inquisitio* from 715 (*CDL* 1.19): see Bertolini 1968, 460–76.

Even though *Rot* 21 and 22 do not explicitly use the word *exercitales*, there is good reason to believe they were still the focus of both laws. *Rot* 21 deals with military service, stating that ‘[i]f someone (*si quis*) refuses to go on campaign with the army, let him give the king and his duke 20 *solidi*’, while *Rot* 22 refers to ducal judicial authority, introduced by ‘if someone of that same army’ (*si quis de ipso exercito*). The legislator shifts back to the usual ‘if someone’ and the absence of references to *exercitales* has led historians to believe in some sort of general conscription as the basis for the enlistment, concluding military service (as *exercitales*) was the duty and prerogative of *all* Lombards, a privilege connected to the *gens* (e.g., Bertolini 1968; Tabacco 1969; Gasparri 1986). The context of the two laws in the *Edict*, however, points in a different direction: both *Rot* 21 and 22 address subjects that are contained within the military laws, and refer to situations relating to the army. The latter mentions

textually that *quis* refers to someone *de exercito*, while the former most likely assumes that the person in case (*quis*) is liable for military service. Supplying *exercitales* on both occasions—and thus suggesting *Rot* 20–25 applied for the particular *part* of the population who owed military service (the *exercitales*)—is certainly not too far-fetched. Hence, an *exercitalis* who failed to join the army or a patrol was penalized with 20 *solidi*, the same penalty for one of the *exercitales* who failed to support his duke. In any case, the legislator was concerned with establishing a penalty for those who, being obligated to serve, failed to do so (*Rot* 21). Rothari did not, however, expand on the obligation, a piece of information, arguably, of common knowledge.

The financial aspects of the military service can be better perceived in a different law, *Rot* 167. This law deals with the destiny of the properties gained in connection with military service, and attests that at least some the Lombards were expected *not* to take part in campaigns:

If brothers, after the death of their father, remain in a shared household (*casa commune*), and one of them acquires property in *obsequium* of the king or of a *iudex*, let him henceforth keep that for himself, without a share going to his brothers; and if he acquires something on campaign with the army (*foras in exercitum*), let it be held in common with the brothers whom he left behind in the shared household.

(*Rot* 167)

This law provides evidence for three different characteristics of Lombard military service: private military service, the extent of the draft, and the distribution of military obligation. Private military service (*obsequium*) is covered in the next section. The other two characteristics refer to the military obligation and are connected. The first point is that the law makes it unquestionable that military service while on campaign (*foras in exercitum*) was not universal. One of the brothers was mandated to join the army (or be fined according to *Rot* 21), while the rest of them stayed behind (Bertolini 1968, 446, cf. Gasparri 1986, 667). The brothers who stayed behind were entitled to a share of the gains received by the one who was risking his life on the battlefield. The claim the brothers who stayed behind had in the profits of war leads logically to the second point: that the financial burden of the military obligation fell on the household, not on the person.

The legal prerogatives of the brothers who stayed back have led scholars to see in *Rot* 167 a statement of the traditional ‘Germanic’ privilege—the duty and honor—to take part in the combat (Bertolini

1968, 447, on *Rot* 167; Giardina 1939). The division of military gains, indeed, goes starkly against the Roman tradition of protecting the immunity of the *castrense peculium*, the military rewards, a tradition preserved by Justinian in his *Institutiones* (Just. *Inst.* 2.12; Haldon 1979, 66ff.). The law establishes that although sons under parental control had no right to make a will, soldiers had been given that right since the time of Augustus while in campaign and, under Trajan, even afterwards. The Lombard legislation seems to break away from the Roman tradition, given that the household was partially entitled to any reward the soldier received while in the army, suggesting compensation for a higher (financial) participation of the family in supporting the soldiers.⁴¹ This shift from public to private support, however, is not exclusive to the Lombards, and similar legislation is found in Visigothic Law,⁴² and, in the following century, in Leo's *Ecloga* (741) (see Table 5.2).⁴³

- 41 The level of participation of the household in the military gains is particularly high, and we argue below that such a high participation was related to Rothari's policy to preserve the property of the households.
- 42 *Lib. Iud.* 4.5.5 is an *antiqua*, preserved by Reccesvintus in the seventh century.
- 43 For the Visigothic Laws, the classical work is; King 1972. For the military laws, see Sánchez 1989. For the *Ecloga* and the developments in the East, see Haldon 1979, 66–81.

Table 5.2 Laws on Military Property

<i>Liber Iudicum</i> 4.5.5	<i>Ecloga</i> 16.2.1
A son who, while his father and mother are still alive, acquires any property, that he earned either through the favor of the king, or as gifts (<i>beneficiis</i>) from patrons, and thence wants to sell or give this property to someone, according to that condition, which is stated in our laws, let him be allowed to. (...) If anyone amongst the <i>leudes</i> gets something, not as gifts (<i>beneficiis</i>) from the king, but acquires it from his own labor as a soldier in an expedition, if he is living in a common house with his father, let a third of what he gets go to his father, and let the son, who worked for it, obtain two-thirds.	If [two] brothers remain after the death of their parents, and one is a soldier, while the other one stays in the house, if there is an arrangement between them, it should be honored. When there is no agreement, and up to ten years of living together have expired, all they should have acquired, both from wage (ρόγας) and from the efforts in the common house, should be shared in equal parts. But if they lived together this ten years, and live three years more, and they part ways, then the soldier should get his horse with harness, together with his weapons and also the armor, if he had acquired them, all the rest should be divided equally. After thirteen years of cohabitation, he can keep what else he receives.

The similarities between the two laws and *Rot* 167 are striking, especially if one considers how they depart from traditional Roman

legislation. The three laws admittedly deal with somewhat different situations: while both Lombard and Byzantine legislations assume the father is dead, and that the brothers are yet to share the inheritance, the Visigothic law (similar to the Justinian law mentioned above) legislates about the son still under the paternal power. That distinction notwithstanding, the three laws tackle the relationship between the individual reward of the soldier (the *castrense pecunium*) and the household he was connected to, either independently or under the tutelage of his father. In a departure from the Roman tradition, the three laws guarantee the right of the household (either the father or his estate) to claim (a part of) the profits from military service.

The evidence from three distinct parts of the Mediterranean attests to a shift in the mechanisms of supporting troops from a direct state wage system to private resources. In all three cases, the common household is entitled to a share of the profits because, arguably, they were involved in supporting the soldier while in campaign. Since the military enterprise became a collective effort—i.e., one brother fights, the others stay behind to provide support—the gains from such enterprise should also be shared. The Byzantine case is of particular interest because it also accounts for the military equipment, which is only fully owned by the soldier after thirteen years of service: before that, it is still partially owned by the household, who supposedly had paid for it. Conversely, during the late Roman period, waged soldiers received no mandatory support from their families, who had thus no claim to their *canstrense pecunium*.

This evidence provides a window into the nature of the Lombard military service. Each household was supposed to supply one recruit (or a certain number of recruits). It is impossible to say whether this obligation fell on every single household or if it was restricted to especially ‘military’ families, but later evidence on charters seems to point to the latter.⁴⁴ In any case, failing to provide a recruit would cost the member liable to enlistment—arguably called *exercitalis*—20 *solidi* (*Rot* 21), a sum not much dissimilar to the late Roman *aurum tironicum*.⁴⁵ The household then supported its *exercitalis*—and in all likelihood also equipped him with weapons and horse—and for doing so had a claim to gains in campaign. Whether this gain was an extraordinary donative or merely a share of the booty is impossible to say, but *Rot* 167 makes it clear that some profit was expected to come to the soldier. If one of the heirs remained in the same household, he was entitled to a share of those gains, as stipulated in *Rot* 167, since he was entrusted with producing the surplus to support his brother in the army. One can further conjecture that, once the common household was divided (as per *Rot* 154), the same obligation applied to all the newly established households. This system seems to have

stemmed from the transition from the assignment of tax units to military families to direct landholding—the military obligation connected to the tax was transmitted to the family together with the land. It also attests for the relatively small wealth of these families, whose personal labor (or supervision) remained central to the production.⁴⁶

Further evidence for this connection between the household and military service comes from the association in the *Edict* between a family and a ‘shield’. In the code, *causa sub uno scuto*, or ‘lawsuit under one shield’, was used to signify ‘a dispute within the same family’.⁴⁷ The meaning of the expression *sub uno scuto* has, however, baffled the translators of the Lombard laws. Azzara and Gasparri suggested that the phrase should be taken with *per pugnam*, whose meaning *sub uno scuto* would be glossing, in the combined sense of ‘con un duello’ (Gasparri 1992, 47).⁴⁸ It seems, however, unlikely that the legislator would gloss plain Latin (something that is not usual in the code), especially since the usual formula for glossing terms (*id est*) is absent. Moreover, how, in that case, to account for ‘uno’? Were both the duelists fighting under a single shield? Beyerle circumvented the translation by using the rather cryptic and archaic German word *einschildig*, whose meaning in this context is hard to fathom (Beyerle 1962, vol. 1, 31–32).⁴⁹

44 CDL 1.19 (715) mentions, besides *exercitales*, several *homines liberi*, which seems to point to a more restricted military obligation.

45 The *aurum tironicum*, a monetary counterpart to the military recruit, corresponded to 25 (*Cod. Th.* VII.13.13) or 30 *solidi* (*Cod. Th.* VII.13.20; Jones 1964a, 432ff., 615).

46 A closer look at the properties and economic standing of the Lombard household is possible only for the eighth century, when charters become more abundant (Wickham 1998, 2005, 213–14).

47 The expression *sub uno scuto*, to my knowledge, is restricted to Rothari’s *Edict*; although Liutprand uses it in a later law, he is referring to back to the *Edict* (Liut 118.II, refers to *Rot* 166). The later *Glossarium Cavense* uses *scutum* as a military unit, into which the *Arimani* would be enlisted following a *dominum*: ‘Arimanus: id est qui sequitur scutum dominicum’. Rothari also uses the expression *sub scuto* to describe the protection of the law (*Rot* 367).

48 The authors suggest for *Rot* 164 (above): ‘perché appare grave ed empio che una simile cause venga risolta “sotto uno scudo” [cioè] con un duello’.

49 For *Rot* 164, ‘Sündhaft erscheint es aber und untragbar, daß eine solche Sache *einschildig* mit Zweikampf ausgetragen wird.’ (emphasis added) He probably meant ‘einschildig’ literally as ‘by one shield’; the term, however, was only used in medieval German with a different sense, meaning a knight whose noble ascendance was single-sided (and hence, would have a single family shield); it has no equivalent in modern German. In the available English translation, Drew (1973, 80–1) opted for simply ignoring the expression and translating as ‘by a duel between the two men’.

While legislating to restrain duels, Rothari stipulated that combat between members of the same family was an abomination, thus mandating oaths as a replacement (*Rot* 164–66; cf. *Rot* 202). These titles are concerned with, first, a claim of illegitimacy for a child by one of the paternal uncles (*barba*) or close relatives (*Rot* 164); second, a claim that the *mundium* of a man's wife did not belong to him (165); and finally, the accusation that a husband has murdered his wife (166). What is interesting here is the explanation: in one law, the legislator stated that 'because it seems serious and impious that such dispute under the same shield (*causa sub uno scuto*) should be solved by battle' (*Rot* 164); the other, 'because it seems unjust for such a large dispute under the same shield (*causa sub uno scuto*) to be solved by battle' (*Rot* 165); and finally, 'because it seems to be absurd and impossible that such dispute under the same shield (*causa sub uno scuto*) should be solved by battle' (*Rot* 166).

Sub uno scuto should be taken in relation to *causa* rather than *per pugnam*, meaning that it was unacceptable that 'a dispute under the same shield would be solved by battle'. *Uno scuto* refers, thus, to a problem within the same family group (or, in the case of the wife, two groups interconnected through marriage), the common element between the three laws. The language in Rothari's *Edict*, then, portrayed each family as a 'shield'; the military implications are evident. The family units were perceived as building blocks of the army, each providing a recruit based on their military affiliation, each sending a 'shield' to war.

Deterioration of military service

The link between the *Edict* and the military is thus the military obligation of the households. The general impoverishment of society, attested by the disappearance of the *ceramica longobarda* (pp. 161–64), threatened to compromise the capacity of the military households to support their enlisted member, an issue that was clearly present for the legislator. Even though it is impossible to ascertain to what extent Rothari was changing (and adding to) existing laws, several laws in the code do seem to be addressing the impoverishment of the military households and might represent Rothari's attempt to reverse the development sketched above. Rothari pursued his efforts to safeguard the property of households by two main avenues: in the first place, he regulated the practice of *pigneratio* and confiscations, aiming to prevent the immediate expropriation of necessary military assets from the indebted households; second, he made provisions to ensure that military rewards remained connected to the household, guaranteeing that the following generation would keep enough resources to honor

their obligation.

The Lombard *pigneratio* was an instrument for creditors to pressure debtors. It consisted of a legal but extrajudicial action by which the lender, once the debtor failed to repay his debt, could confiscate part of the debtor's property as a surety (*pignus*). It differed from modern pledges or mortgages, for example, because the property was neither agreed upon by contract as a surety, nor was its custody included in the terms of the loan, but instead, it was claimed as a result of a delay, as a gage. As usual, the *Edict* does not provide a full description of the procedure, which likely relied heavily on previous Roman juridical tradition and local practice.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Rothari reserved eight laws addressing and restraining *pigneratio*, establishing what could be taken as *pignus* and what could not (*Rot* 245–52; Roggero 2003, 61–67). Notwithstanding the legal clarifications in Rothari, the *pigneratio* was essentially ‘stragiudiziale e “privata”, senza cioè l'intervento di organi “publici”’ (Roggero 2003, 61), constituting at that time a private interaction between the creditor and the debtor. The evidence in the law code suggests that the *pigneratio*, although legal in nature, could result in a violent seizure of property, sometimes involving armed bands (*Rot* 249).

Concerned with the violence involved in the process and with the ruthless appropriation of property, Rothari attempted to regulate *pigneratio* and prevent abusive confiscations:

⁵⁰ For the late Roman *pigneratio*, see Levy 1951, 59–61, 120–21.

245 If someone has a debtor, let him call him once, and twice, and up to a third time, and if he will not pay back the debt, or will not pay composition, then let him take a *pignus* from his property that can lawfully taken as *pignus*.

246 If someone should dare to take a *pignus* from another on account of a debt or legal suit before he called him a third time, let him restore ninefold to the possession of the owner the *pignus* which he took before the [third] call for repayment.

(*Rot* 245–256)

Since it is impossible to reconstruct the previous legislation, a way to gauge Rothari's intervention is to compare the rule he was trying to implement with how contemporary laws dealt with the subject of illegal distraint. Most post-Roman laws indeed echo Rothari's concern with illegal seizure of pledges.⁵¹ Besides the *Edict*, the harshest punishment for distraint is to be found under the *Edictus Theodorici*, which demands a restitution of the value fourfold (*Theod. Edict* 124);

in the *Bavarian Law*, the creditor has to return the illegally seized property plus another of same value (a twofold penalty), while a fine of 40 *solidi* is paid to the duke (*Lex Bau.* 13.3); in the Visigothic *Liber Iudicum*, Reccesvintus (649–72) suppressed *pigneratio*, but older legislation preserved in the code had likewise penalized someone taking a *pignus* against the debtor's will at twice its value (*Lib. Iud.* 5.6.1). In comparison, Rothari set a fine of *nine* times the original value. Such severity firmly sets it apart from the average, and attests for Rothari's determination in preventing illegal *pigneratio*.

Rothari also established a range of properties as immune from distraint, adding strict prescriptions to enforce it. The intention was to protect certain assets, even in case of debt. The kind of property Rothari safeguards is illuminating: the king outlaws distraint of 'a stud of mares or a drove of pigs' (*Rot* 249), 'a tamed horse, or a bull or cows trained to the plow' (*Rot* 250), and 'a holding classed as tributary (*casa ordinata tributaria*)' (*Rot* 252). The pattern here seems to be direct connection to military obligations and the protection of properties whose confiscation would impede such services. Mares were used as mounts (but also for breeding),⁵² while pigs were possibly rations.⁵³ Focusing on the other side of the recruitment equation, namely the brother who stayed behind to finance the soldier, the king extended severe punishment for the distraint of plow horses and cows, essential to maintaining the household. Amongst the property that could not be taken as a pledge, was also the *casa ordinata tributaria*, which, as argued above (pp. 95–96), possibly represented the last vestige of the tax system of accommodation: now under the control of the household, it was still earmarked for supporting troops. Those guilty of seizing mares and pigs, and consequently preventing the freeman from joining the army, received capital punishment, unless they could redeem it by 900 *solidi*, of which the royal court would claim half, in order, certainly, to maintain the royal engagement in the case (besides producing revenue to the fisc). The highest fine in the code is 900 *solidi*, with one single exception;⁵⁴ it is the same fine as murder (*Rot* 14). In addition to that, if the *pignus* was confiscated by violence, the *dominus* involved had to compensate for slaves he used in the attack, while other freemen involved were also fined. For the sake of comparison, the *Bavarian Law* penalizes someone 40 *solidi* for holding a freeman prisoner as a *pignus* (*Lex Bau.* 4.25), while the Alamanic *Pactus* charges 40 *solidi* for pledging illegal property (*Pact. Alem.* 22.1, cf. *Leg. Alem.* 67.1 and 94). The concern Rothari had with what could and could not be confiscated, it can be suggested, was connected with the obligations the military families had to the army, and the assets they had to maintain in order to meet those obligations. In this concern, Rothari

was firmly grounded in Roman legal tradition: safeguarding property connected to fulfilling tax obligations or providing for agricultural production can be traced back to Constantine (*Cod. Ius.* 8.16.7 [Constantine, a. 315] and 8.16.8 [Honorius, a. 414]).

- 51 See *Cod. Ius.* 8.13–14; pledges must be, nonetheless, voluntary (see, for example, *Cod. Ius.* 8.13.10).
- 52 See *HL* 2.9, which seems to suggest that, at least by Paul's time, the Lombards rode mares instead of horses. *HL* 1.24 has the Gepids offending the Lombards by comparing them to mares (which the offended Alboin compares positively to donkeys), although that seems to have no bearing on whether they rode them to battle or not.
- 53 Bacon (*laridum*) was a common food in the Roman military *annona* (*CTh.* VII, 4.4 and *Nov. Val.* XXXVI, 2 [a. 452]; Jones 1964a, 628–29), a tradition which was presumably kept by the Lombards.
- 54 Namely, the murder of a wife not inculpated in any crime, *Rot* 200, 1,200 *solidi*.

Another legal measure in the *Edict* that attests Rothari's concern with the depreciation of household properties was his intervention in inheritance. The guiding principle was to ensure that legitimate sons (presumably the ones to carry the military obligation) received a significant enough share of the estate to be able to carry on their duties. That meant, in the first place, guaranteeing equal shares for all legitimate sons, and, in the second place, preventing natural sons from removing too much of the property from the legitimate branch of the family. *Rot* 154 restricted the inheritance of natural sons, so that in the case of one legitimate son, all the natural sons would divide a third of the inheritance, in the case of two legitimate sons, a fifth, and so on. The problem with endowing natural sons was that the larger the share they inherited, the less was available for the legitimate ones. Presumably, the military obligation connected to the household passed to legitimate sons, and, thus, any property given to natural sons was lost to the support of the army. It is interesting to notice that the law guaranteed each legitimate son a share of the father's property, while each new natural son dug into the decreasing lot of his fellow natural brothers. In other words, each new legitimate son increased the share directed to legitimate sons, in order to accommodate his inheritance (and hence guarantee the minimum necessary resource to honor his obligations), while the remaining portion destined to the natural sons was further divided in case of new natural sons. In addition to that, *Rot* 155 prevented the father from making natural sons 'equals or similar' (*aequales aut consimilis*) to the legitimate ones without consent of their legitimate brothers (and only once they attained the legal age of twelve) (*Rot* 155). If someone died without a legitimate son, still only a third of the property went to

natural sons, while another the other two-thirds went to a daughter and back to the family, thus keeping the two original thirds for the *scutum*, the military households. *Bona caduca* went to the fisc (*Rot* 158).

Another reform related to family property involved the fraction of military reward that should go to the household. The last section pointed to the similarities between this law, *Rot* 167, and *Lib. Iud.* 4.5.5 and *Ecloga* 16.2, suggesting they attest to a similar process of 'privatization' of military supply (see pp. 166–68). It was noticed then, however, that *Rot* 167 altered the participation of the household in the military gains, and it is this aspect of the law that is relevant here. Comparing the three laws, it is clear that the involvement of the household in the three cases was considerably different. In the Visigothic law, the household (in that case under paternal control) was entitled to a third of the soldier gains, which, evidently, would become part of his own inheritance when his father died. Hence, in the case of two brothers, the soldier ultimately kept two-thirds of his profits as a soldier, plus half of what went to the household (the other third), assuming the father died intestate, adding up to five-sixths of what he received as a soldier (*Lib. Iud.* 4.2.1). The Byzantine case, like the Lombard example, considers a situation in which both brothers were already in possession of the inheritance, but had not undertaken a division of it. According to the law, again assuming there are only two brothers, the soldier gave up all his gains to the household and received back half as his inheritance. In addition to that, after thirteen years of military service, he received his equipment if he paid for it himself. If the property remained undivided for over thirteen years, he kept as his own any earnings he received. After that, he kept his gains *in toto*. The condition *Rot* 167 established was much more generous for the household. All the profits from military service returned to the household, and once one of the brothers married (and established his own family unit), all the soldier kept from what he had earned was that which composed his share of the inheritance (which included, of course, the gains from agricultural production supervised by his brothers), independent of the length of his term of service: if he had a single brother, that added up to half of his gains, but it was divided further in a larger family (*Rot* 154).

Compared with other law codes, the *Edict* is much more strict in keeping the patrimony within the military households. There is no way of knowing on which previous legal context Rothari was working, but it is very likely that he changed the law to further protect the property of the household. The title should be read in connection with the remaining laws regulating inheritance: taken together, these laws aimed to keep (military) households up to strength and to provide

rules that ensured the organic reproduction of these families did not spread the property of the household too thin, undermining the availability of resources to support the army.

From Rothari's prescriptions in the code, properties of the military households were threatened on two fronts. First, the poorer landholders incurred debt with wealthier families, possibly seeking capital for sowing or acquiring slaves and livestock. If the investment failed to meet expectations, the level of indebtedness grew, and so did the dependency of the poorer families on the richer ones, resulting on loss of the former's properties to meet the latter's demands. Eventually, the 'magnates' seized the property from those in their debt, either legally by *pignatio* or illegally by confiscation. The process was probably not unlike the landing of this military aristocracy in the late sixth century (see [Chapter 3](#)), only this time the predatory process was operating within the military class. The second threat was the dispersal of the few resources still available to them. Whatever property or income was detracted from the household and moved away from military obligation—be it to the personal assets of a soldier or to the inheritance portion given to a natural son, presumably without military obligations—it reduced the overall military viability of the household.

The general impoverishment of Lombard society, and especially the bankruptcy of part of the middling class of landholders, damaged the base for conscription, debilitating the army. By the mid-seventh century, Lombard society was composed of an increasing number of indebted and impoverished families, and a small group of 'magnates'. These upcoming elite profited from the situation, acquiring properties of the impoverished freemen by confiscation, or sometimes by sheer expropriation: as muscle, this new elite used privately supported military entourages. Such entourages were, presumably, a standard feature of the Lombard army, and were likely on the rise with this new elite.

Military entourages and private power: obsequium and gasindium

So far the focus has been military service as a public obligation. The Lombard army, it was suggested, was composed of soldiers gathered from the families who had military obligations. The king and the dukes had the privilege to assemble the army (*Rot* 21), probably only when there was specific need for doing so; locally the *iudices* were responsible for controlling the walls of cities and fortresses (*Rot* 244), which might imply that at least some forces were regularly available,

even if only for the occasional shift manning the walls. This public obligation of military service was not, however, the only military commitment, and some freemen were also engaged in private military activities within retinues of powerful men. The Lombard sources deal with this kind of private arrangement using two terms, *obsequium* and *gasindium*, the former meaning the kind of relation between a 'lord' and a soldier, the latter the particular status of a man in such relation with the king or a duke (cf. Gasparri 1986, esp. 669–72).

Rothari's *Edict* provides very little information on military retinues, which might mean either that they were of small importance or that they operated within a sphere in which Rothari did not feel the need to intervene. The evidence is preserved in three laws, namely *Rot* 167, 177 and 225. First, *Rot* 177 provides some information about the nature of the bond. According to the law, the soldier in a relationship of *obsequium* could break the bond by returning the property he had received:

If some freeman has the capacity to migrate with his *fara* where he would like to, within the territory of our kingdom, provided permission was given to him by the king, *and if the duke or any other freemen has given him property, and the man who wants to migrate no longer wants to remain with him or his heirs, let the property be restored to the donor or his heirs.*

(emphasis added)

It follows that the soldier received property from a duke or any other freeman to be in his service. Secondly, *Rot* 225 legislates on the right of ownership of a freedman, and mentions the nature of property received in private service:

And if it so happens that [the freedman] died without an heir, and previously while alive disposed of his own personal property (that is, *andegawere* and *arigawere*) according to the Lombard law, let him to whom it was donated keep it. But as regards the property he held as a gift from his benefactor [i.e., his *manumittor*], let them be returned to that patron or his heir. *And if he acquired something as a reward for his work in gasindium of a duke or obsequium of freemen, let those things be returned to the donor.* Other property, however, assuming, as said, that he did not leave heirs, and that he did not dispose of them while alive, let his patron succeed him as would a kinsman.

(emphasis added)

This law reinforces the idea that property donated as a consequence of *obsequium* was conditional on service and was to be returned once it was no longer being rendered. The service could be passed to the next generation, since both laws at least assume that the property could be

returned not only to the person with whom the service was contracted but also to his heirs. *Rot* 225 also hints that the service to a duke (but probably also to the king) was called *gasindium*, while the term for the service in general was *obsequium*, which could also be rendered to a private person (*homo privatus*). The different terminology suggests that the nature of the service might have varied whether the donor was a duke (and, again, presumably, the king) or a private (but nonetheless powerful) individual. Later legislation attests that the term *gasindius* was, at least in the eighth century, also applied to similar service to the king (*Liut* 62).

Finally, *Rot* 167 informs about the difference between the public military service and the *obsequium*. This law, as argued above, recognizes the involvement of the household in supporting the public military service but it also spells out that such was not the case for *obsequium*. While the soldier shared property acquired in the army with the household, he kept all property acquired in *obsequium*. It follows that, unlike regular military service, part of what the soldier received in *obsequium* was to support himself during service (such as rations), which justified his claim to the entirety of his rewards. This property was, as argued above, related to his service and should be returned if the bond was broken, or, arguably, if he left no heir who could step up in his place once he died (*Rot* 167, 225). The fact that the law demanded the soldier who was moving away to return the property may indicate that this property was usually movable, although *Rot* 167 might be equally referring to renouncing his rights to some landed property.⁵⁵ In addition to that, the lord also supported the soldier, at least while rendering service and, for that reason, no resources from the household were required. Extrapolating from this evidence, it could be suggested that powerful men (kings, dukes, *iudices*, but also other private *potentes*, in sum, anyone who could spare the surplus) supported small-scale private forces, composed of free- (but also freed-, *Rot* 225) men, many of whom were probably also *exercitales* in the army. The lords provided these people with rations (but maybe also land) as well as military equipment.

Obsequium consisted of military service not only to higher officials (such as dukes [*Rot* 177 and 225], kings or local *iudices* [*Rot* 167]), but also private men (*Rot* 177). The question is, especially in that which concerns private entourages, whether this service was the result of the expanding private power or simply an outsourcing of public military duties. In other words, were these *gasindii* part of the army that happened to be funded directly by large estates (in lieu of taxes?), or were they hired swords working for private interests? The question has been posed for the late Roman entourages, the *bucellarii*, but has seldom been tackled for the post-Roman kingdoms. Most of this

debate is centered on the East, especially on account of the rich papyrographic material available for Egypt.⁵⁶ Some scholars argue that these *retinues* were a private enterprise, motivated either by a growth of aristocratic power or by a foreign ‘Germanic’ tradition that overshadowed the public monopoly over the armed forces; for others, these *bucellarii* constituted a public force supported directly by private funds, in some sort of *munera*, instead of indirectly through taxes.⁵⁷

- 55 The *antiqua* legislation preserved in the *Lib. Iud.* states that if the soldier moved to a different *patronus*, he was supposed to return what he gained from the older *patronus*, while the new one should give him land. See. *Lib. Iud.* 5.3.4; 5.3.1 makes it clear that amongst the gifts were weapons, which should remain with the soldier.
- 56 See, especially Rémondon 1974; Gascou 1976; for the specificity of Egyptian society, see Palme 2007.
- 57 The status of the *bucellarii* within the late Roman military organization is still a contentious topic. The traditional view understood the *bucellarii* as private soldiers fighting under powerful landlords, usually seen as a Germanic institution and a prequel to feudalism; see, for example, Jones 1964a, 664–67; Schmitt 1994. In the 1970s, a new interpretation was put forward by Rémondon (and later developed by Gascou and Carrié) suggesting that the *bucellarii* were in fact public troops settled and supported by private capital, and that the private use of those troops was, indeed, strictly forbidden (though widely used); see Rémondon 1974; Gascou 1976; Carrié 1995, followed by Liebeschuetz 1986, 1990, 43–47; Whittaker 1993. Recently, this new interpretation has been questioned by a restatement of the growing power of private magnates, see Sarris 2006, 162–75 (but see also 2004), followed by Petersen 2013, 57–62.

The Lombard evidence is unclear. The *Edict* indeed hints at the presence of armed men around the *potentes*. Soldiers in *obsequium* were available to do their bidding, and probably contributed to their influence over the rest of the population, providing muscle for confrontations (e.g., the confiscations of *pignus*). But the *Edict* also implies that use of private soldiers as thugs was illegal, and some evidence suggests that these privately *supported* forces were not supposed to be privately *used*. Rothari attests to the private use of these military entourages, usually in situations of internal conflict, and harshly prohibits their use:

If someone, to avenge an offence, rushes armed (*mano armata*)⁵⁸ against someone, or invades a hamlet with an *army* of up to four men, let the leader die for the illicit presumption, or at least pay 900 *solidi*, half to the king and half to the one on whom the offence was inflicted. And if those who were with him are free, let each one compensate with 80 *solidi*, half to the king and half to him who suffered the offence; this does not include instances of setting fire to houses in the hamlet, or committing manslaughter for which let [additional] compensation be paid to him whose houses are burned, or kinfolk or

slaves killed, according to how their worth is evaluated.

(Rot 19)

The legislator's use of the term 'illicit presumption' (*inlecita praesumptionem*) points to the illegal use of privately supported soldiers in private errands, although he might be just referring to the case at hand. Anyhow, the law attests that magnates (presumably those whom the law calls *priores*, 'leaders') could put together military bands, here called *exercitus* (though that could just be three or four men), to pursue their individual interests.

58 Or possibly 'with an armed band'.

A similar example comes from the legislation on *pigneratio*, mentioned above (Rot 249), which also presupposes the use of an entourage and fines those involved. Rot 249 reveals a snapshot of how entourages contributed to the 'daily torments of the poor', to use Rothari's expression, painting a picture of how confiscations could happen and how private military bands were involved. The mentions of entourages, indeed, suggest that the legislator was concerned with their abuse by powerful men and there is no evidence for the 'licit' use of such troops. This omission notwithstanding, it is safe to assume there were legal employments of entourages. The fact that many were held by office holders, probably supported by their own private lands, suggests they were part of how the system was wired—or had been at some point.

An army of recruitment or an army of military retainues?

The Lombard army was thus composed of recruits from military households, who equipped and supported the *exercitales* while on campaign (see pp. 166–70 and of supernumerary troops supported directly from private properties, either by a private owner or by a government official (such as a *iudex*, a duke, or the king). These additional troops served *in obsequium* or *in gasindium* and were arguably privately supported public agents, although in practice illegally used as private troops. The balance between the two types of unit cannot be reconstructed. The two forms of recruitment, however, depend on different—or even antagonistic—social organizations: while the recruitment of *exercitales* was contingent on the general health of a middling group of landowners, privately supported entourages required larger properties producing significant amounts of

surplus. That was particularly the case during an economic involution, in which the available resources were dwindling, and thus the foundation of large fortunes could come only from the impoverishment of small landholders. In the mid-seventh century, the *Edict* makes it clear that the growth of the latter came, at least in part, at the expense of the former. For the Lombards under Rothari, the question was whether the growing private entourages could replace regular conscription as the primary source of soldiers, as seems to be the tendency in late Merovingian Francia and, to a certain extent, in Visigothic Spain (Halsall 2003, 56).

Retinues had been an important part of the fifth- and sixth-century Roman army, where they were called *bucellarii*. Generals such as Belisarius and Narses supported large retinues, which composed a significant part of the army.⁵⁹ By the mid-seventh century, the *bucellarii* had been fully incorporated into the regular army, which points to a breakdown of the larger properties necessary to support them.⁶⁰ For the West, scholars have highlighted the role of retinues, usually seen as ‘bodyguards’, in the composition of the army (e.g., Halsall 2003, 48–49; Petersen 2013, esp. 63–74). The Frankish *antrustio* and the Visigothic *gardingus* seem to occupy a similar position to the Lombard *gasindius*,⁶¹ while the *Liber Iudicum* legislates on *obsequium* in terms not too dissimilar to Rothari’s *Edict* (*Lib. Iud.* 5.3.1–5; Sánchez 1989, 113–15). Military entourages had a more prosperous destiny in the West, both in Francia and in Spain, where large private landholdings supported significant number of followers (Halsall 2003, 40–70; Petersen 2013, 63–73). It has been suggested that in the seventh century the balance between recruited troops and military entourages, either supported directly by the court or indirectly by magnates, started shifting towards the latter (roughly at the same time as in the East it shifted towards the former), and by the eighth century the core of the Frankish army was based on military retinues (Fouracre 2000, 137–54; Bachrach 2001, esp. 59–76; 2013, 5–7; Halsall 2003, 56, 74–75; Petersen 2013, 224–55, but see Goffart 2008).

Amongst the Lombards, retinues seem to have initially been of small importance in the composition of the army (*contra* Halsall 2003, 64; Petersen 2013, 183), though it is evidently hard to establish the ratio between *exercitales* and privately supported retinues. Recently, Leif Petersen has argued for a substantial role for these retinues in Lombard society, suggesting that the *faræ* were actually ‘large *obsequia* (...) led by individual dukes’, and that, even after the expansion of royal control, the dukes maintained ‘military forces in the form of the *gasindius*’ (Petersen 2013, resp. 183, 185). The sources, however, should not be stretched that far. The relationship between

the dukes and the *fara* is nowhere to be found in the contemporary evidence, and it would be risky to assume that each of the arguably small *farae* was controlled by its own individual duke.⁶² As to the relationship between the *fara* and *obsequium*, the sole source, *Rot* 177, refers to a soldier breaking his bond of *obsequium* to move *with* his *fara*: were the *fara* based on the *obsequium*, the entire law would make no sense. Considering, as suggested above, that most of Lombard society was composed at this point of free, small landholders, it seems more likely that private retinues were more the exception than the rule, which corresponds to the small presence of such relations in the law code. Presumably, both dukes and kings maintained larger retinues, called *gasindii* to differentiate from freemen in *obsequium* of (private) freemen, continuing a tradition that was known from similar practices of commanders in the Roman army (pp. 176–77). To consider these retinues around dukes and kings as effectively ‘private’ might be misleading: in all likelihood, they were troops supported by ‘public’ resources, be it royal or ducal, and taking part in the ‘public’ army. Those soldiers likely served in the army in a quasi-official position, and their support from royal and ducal property could be seen as an alternative form of military pay. The same could have been true of men *in obsequium* to other private freemen, although retinues supported by private landholders were arguably of much smaller scale. Given, as argued previously (pp. 166–70). That each household contributed with a recruit, it would not be too far-fetched to suggest larger properties were also supposed to support, on their own coin, small units for the army, maybe as a form of *munera* attached to controlling multiple properties originally earmarked for military support.

- 59 Belisarius (7,000 men): *Proc. Bella* 7.1.2–15; 18–20; Narses (400): *Agath. Hist.* 1.9.
- 60 Rémondon 1974; Gascou 1976; Carrié 1995; Liebeschuetz 1986, 1990, 43–47; Whittaker 1993. Recently, this new interpretation has been questioned by a restatement of the growing power of private magnates, see Sarris 2006, 162–75 (but see also, 2004), followed by Petersen 2013, 57–62.
- 61 Halsall 2003, 48. For the Visigoths, the classic works are Sánchez-Albornoz 1967; Sánchez 1989, 58–72; for the Franks, Ganshof 1955.
- 62 For *fara*, see p. 63. The only reference linking dukes to *farae* comes from *HL* 2.9, in which Gisulf asks Alboin to pick the *farae* to constitute the Friulian duchy: Paul, however, does not suggest each *fara* was commanded by a duke, but instead that Gisulf asked for several *farae* to accept the command of Friuli. One should add that Paul is clearly at a loss when he tries to define what a *fara* was in that same chapter.

The fragility of Rothari’s army

The structure of the Lombard army was conditioned by the tradition of the Roman army, from which it originated, but also by the social and economic possibilities of the late sixth and early seventh centuries. The period from the establishment of the Lombards with Alboin to the creation of the monarchy with Authari observed the settlement of an expeditionary force gone rogue in a former Roman territory, followed by adjustments of the mechanisms used to support the army. The 'accommodation model', however, could not outlive the collapse of the tax system, dictated by the decaying state of the Italian (and Mediterranean) economy. In the process, the Lombards were able to acquire land, which eventually became the new base for the support of the army. In a shift that would be mirrored by the eastern army in half a century, the Lombards transferred the support of the army from the state to the household, preserving the military obligation of military families. The resulting structure of the army had, then, the military household as the building block, supplying recruits our sources call *exercitales*. The *exercitales* arguably maintained their former units, the *farae*. Side by side with the *exercitales*, there were groups of 'private' soldiers, supported directly by the kings and the dukes, called *gasindi*; other units, in *obsequium* of private men, might also have been involved in warfare in some capacity. The military households were central not only to the recruitment systems, but also to the support of the army: each household provided, armed, and supported an *exercitalis*. As compensation, the household kept a share of the military gains. If the households lost their capacity to arm and support the soldier they provided, the backbone of the army's logistics would collapse. For that reason, it was fundamental to Rothari that the military class would own enough property not only to support the recruits but also to provide them with weaponry and mounts. What Rothari probably encountered when he assembled the Lombard army in the 640s, however, was a group in which a significant part of the soldiers (though it is not possible to know how significant) was able neither to provide their equipment nor support themselves while on campaign. At the other end of the social spectrum, there was a group that profited from the situation, and was in a position to exploit the impoverished soldiers. This aristocracy 'on the make' concentrated the few remaining resources and increased their capital, bringing into their orbit some freemen under bound of *obsequium*. The small military entourages could, presumably, be very effective for raiding nearby territories, but, even if they could actually be used in campaign, the limited wealth of this new elite could hardly support a force to be reckoned with.

Thus, by the early seventh century, on account of the large middling

class of free Lombards owing military service and the rather restricted number of magnates who could afford to support large entourages, the Lombard army still arguably relied more on recruitment based on military obligation than on privately supported retainues. Given the military success from the final years of Authari (see [Chapter 3](#)), and especially under Agilulf (as suggested in [Chapter 4](#)), this arrangement presumably was able to put in the field a reliable fighting force. This picture probably began to change in the following decades, with the concentration of wealth and the bankruptcy of the free landholder. By the mid-seventh century, the impact of the economic decline and social differentiation had dramatically curtailed the social bases for the army. The growing social inequality determined that the number of households that were able to supply armed *exercitales* diminished, while a few families could march to battle with additional troops they could support. The replacement of freeholders by dependants did not necessarily decrease the effectiveness of an army, as the Frankish experience clearly shows (see n. 61). The limited result of Rothari's army, as well as the king's concern for the health of the small-scale owners, however, suggests that amongst the Lombards this process of privatization produced negative results. It could be suggested that the limited wealth of this new elite prevented their entourages from becoming numerous enough to make up for the loss of recruits. Not surprisingly, Rothari does not legislate on the use of retainues in the armed forces: even though one of the laws published by Liutprand (712–44) might have dealt with the use of private forces (*Liut* 83.14), it is not until Aistulf (749–56) that a law clearly suggests that those with more property should bring extra equipment (although it is impossible to know if that actually meant extra soldiers) (*Ahis* 2–3, cf. Gasparri 1986, 176–77). In any case, it is likely that, after Rothari, and especially after the collapse of the northern kingdom and the Beneventan conquest under Grimoald, the Lombard army depended more and more on military entourages supported by magnates and, especially, by the growing royal possessions.⁶³

63 See, for example, the growing concern of Liutprand to protect his *gasindi*: *LLLiut*, 62.ix, and the dramatic change in value (and nature) of the fines for absence of military service: *LLLiut* 83.xiv (cf. *Rot* 21); cf. Bertolini 1968, 435–40

Conclusion

Reconsidering Paul the Deacon is inevitably reconsidering the Lombard period. Without the certainty traditionally ascribed to *il diacono*, the political narrative of the kingdom is no longer a line, but a labyrinth of social and cultural developments deeply integrated with the political events. The resulting picture challenges the assumptions about the establishment of the Lombards and the role the military played in the process in three fundamental ways. First, it reevaluated the nature of the group that was established in northern Italy in 568/9 and that eventually became the Lombard kingdom under Autari in 584: while Paul presents the Lombards as a people with a glorious past, the contemporary evidence suggests that the Lombards were intimately connected to the Byzantine army in northern Italy, which at some point escaped imperial control. As a part of the Byzantine army, this group rebelled in a context of military dissatisfaction well known to the sixth century, and shifted its allegiance to an ersatz new government produced *in loco* and within the army, which could secure the continuing opposition against the empire. This new political unit formed the base of Alboin's Lombards. As a corollary, the social context of the Lombard kingdom was similar to that of the Byzantine army in the East, facing similar demands to solve the endemic problem of logistics and lack of resources. In the seven decades that followed the rebellion, the Lombards experimented with different forms of military support, first relying on the tax system, and later, with the collapse of the tax base, shifting the support of the troops to military households. By the mid-seventh century, this system based on the households had been eroded by increasing social inequality and the impoverishment of many of these families, resulting, we argued, in the rather disappointing performance of the army under Rothari (and eventually creating the military context for the conquest of the northern kingdom by the Beneventan Duke Grimoald in c.662).

The second challenge to the traditional picture of Lombard Italy refers to the role of the Franks in the establishment of the Lombard kingdom and the preservation of Lombard independence. This topic was of particular interest to Paul, given that he had just observed the Frankish conquest of the Lombard kingdom (774), and it is not surprising that he emphasized in his work the independence of the

Lombards and their love of liberty. Whenever Paul turned his attention to the Franks, he was eager to stress the Lombard victories in the sixth century and the good relations between the Franks and Liutprand in the eighth (*HL* 6.58). Contemporary sources, however, bring into focus the constant Frankish interventions in Italy, and how the creation of the Lombard kingdom was intrinsically connected to the Frankish policy of establishing and maintaining satellite states around its borders. In that role, the Lombards were in a position very similar to that of the Alamanni, the Thuringians, and the Bavarians. What makes the Lombards stand out is the fact that, given the strongly Romanized and literate milieu in which the Lombard kingdom was created, the Lombards produced and preserved enough sources to leave a lasting legacy to historiography, while Thuringians, Bavarians, and Alamanni left almost no trace. From that perspective, the Carolingian conquest in 774 can be portrayed not as a drastic rupture, but as a continuation of Frankish policy in Italy, exerted henceforth through direct government, not unlike the same developments in Thuringia or Bavaria at the same period.

Finally, the focus on contemporary material reminds us that, on account of the nature of the surviving source material, the Lombard kingdom in Italy should be studied as two separate periods. The first period, which is the subject of the present work, starts with the establishment of the Lombards in 569–74, and goes up to Rothari (c.635–52), not without a major gap in the narrative from the final days of Agilulf (590–616). After Rothari, with the exception of a few laws published by Grimoald, there is a long gap in the source material, and we are mostly dependent on unverifiable notices from the *HL*. The second period, comprising roughly the eighth century, left a much richer collection of sources, including additions to the legislation by several kings (namely, Liutprand, Ratchis, and Aistulf) and an increasing number of private charters surviving from Liutprand's reign onwards. Furthermore, Paul's greatest value as a primary source is, arguably, for the events closest to his lifetime.

The changes that took place in Italian society between the 650s and the 710s, however, should not be underestimated. It was argued here that Rothari represented a crisis in the social system set in place in the time of Authari and Agilulf, and it was suggested that the measures undertaken in the *Edict* were probably not enough to stop the tendency for the concentration of wealth in the hands of fewer magnates and the impoverishment of significant sectors of society. In what concerns the military organization, the model Rothari was trying to preserve in the 640s—a mixed force formed essentially by recruits, but reinforced by privately supported soldiers, similar in many ways to the late sixth-century Byzantine system from which it originated—

most likely gave way to a different system, now favoring troops supported by large private properties, similar to the developments in the Frankish military under the last Merovingians. The fact that the eighth-century Lombard kings saw themselves as continuators of Rothari in their legislative role should not hide the fact that the laws from the seventh and eighth centuries legislate for significantly different societies. Only Paul's binding narrative of Lombard history allows for a smooth transition between the two periods.

There is much still to be done on Lombard Italy. Firstly, the analysis of the development of the military suggested here, which takes into account similar developments both in other Mediterranean regions and in Frankish Gaul, could be expanded to a comparative history of post-Roman military organizations (and its social bases), focusing on differences and similarities in the development of the army in the Byzantine Empire and the western post-Roman kingdoms. In this sense, Italy (but also Spain) provides an interesting case study that can link the vast scholarship produced on the Byzantine military with the equally impressive production on the Frankish army. Much could also be gained from a detailed comparison of how different societies were organized for and by warfare, and how the late Roman military system evolved in different parts of the Mediterranean. This book argues for the value of the study of military logistics and recruitment to understand how societies worked, and thus the usefulness of tackling questions of organization, allocation of resources, and hierarchy, especially in increasingly militarized societies such as the post-Roman kingdoms and the Byzantine Empire.

Secondly, the analysis of the social elements of the Lombard military organization can be taken further into the second period of the Lombard rule in Italy. As has been suggested, Rothari marked the beginning of a larger crisis in military logistics that led to the defeat and conquest of the kingdom by Grimoald (662–71), in an especially poorly documented period. Once the sources became available again, in the early eighth century, the military organization of the northern kingdom had clearly changed. The new organization, more dependent on large properties and direct royal control, allowed the Lombards to expand their control to almost the entire peninsula, under militarily successful kings such as Liutprand (712–44) and Aistulf (749–56). At the same period, the rise of the Carolingians in Francia finally led to a change in relations with Italy, replacing the indirect rule favored by the Merovingian kings with a direct Frankish government, starting with military interventions under Pipin (743–68) and culminating with the actual military conquest by Charlemagne (768–814) in 774.

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